



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

By EDGAR P. JACOBS

Part 3

THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH



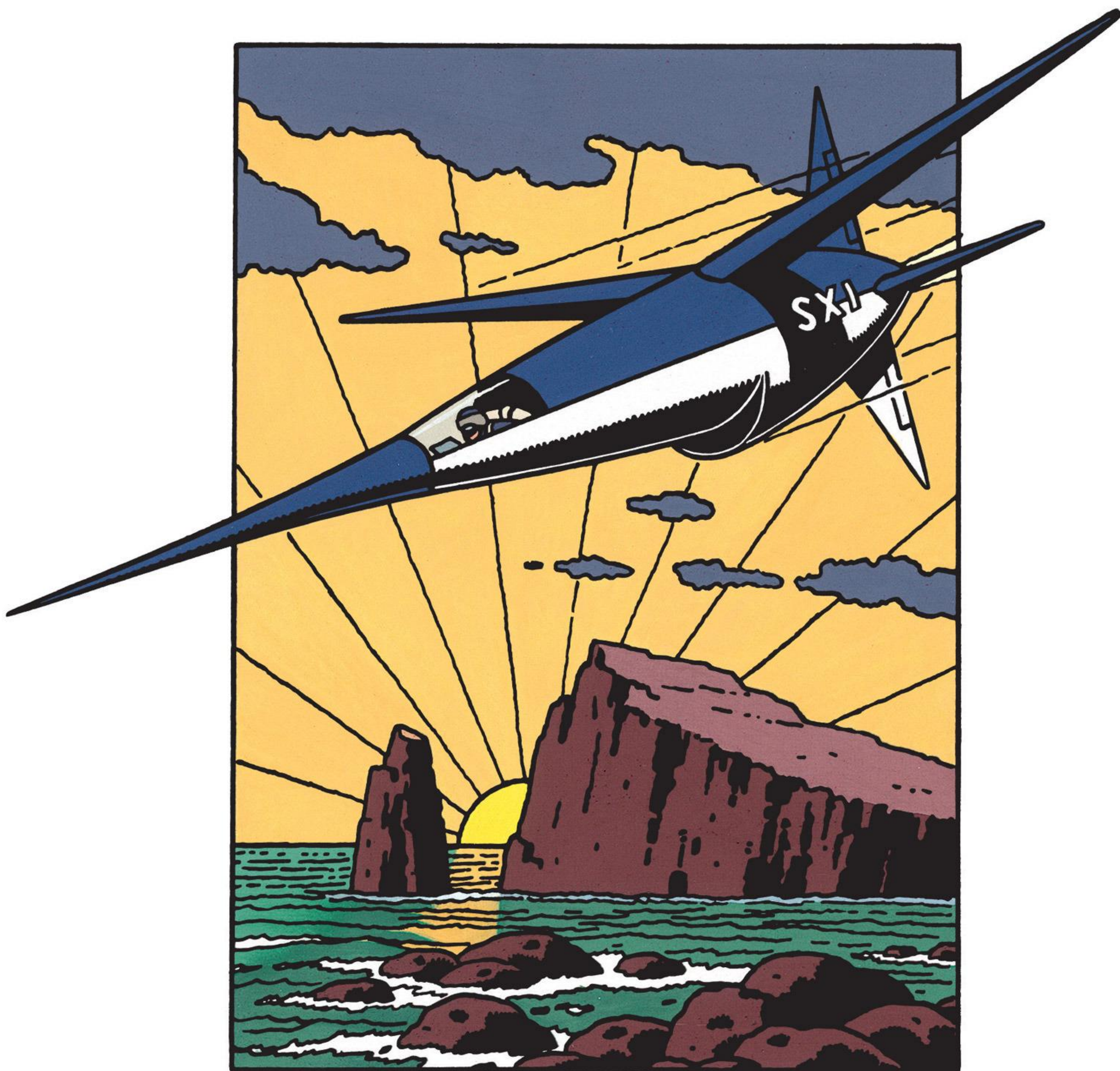
E. P. JACOBS

THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH

PART 3

SX1 STRIKES BACK

Colour work: Philippe Biermé, Luce Daniels



PREVIOUSLY IN THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH:

FOLLOWING THE SURPRISE ATTACK BY THE FORCES OF USURPER BASAM DAMDU, CAPTAIN BLAKE OF THE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICE AND PROFESSOR MORTIMER WERE FORCED TO HURRIEDLY ESCAPE THE SCAPELL FACTORY ABOARD THE GOLDEN ROCKET IN ORDER TO MAKE THEIR WAY TO A SECRET BASE AND ALLOW MORTIMER TO FINISH HIS WORK ON A NEW 'ULTIMATE WEAPON': THE SWORDFISH...



...AS THE ARMOURD CAR SHELLS BLAKE AND MORTIMER'S REFUGE, THE CANYON IS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH THE SOUND OF HEAVY GUNFIRE...

FORTUNATELY, OUR HEROES HAD TIME TO DESTROY SCAPELL AND ITS MILITARY SECRETS BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF IMPERIAL TROOPS LED BY COLONEL OLRİK...



THE BEZENDJAS HASN'T RELAXED HIS SURVEILLANCE AND...

BUT THE GOLDEN ROCKET WAS SHOT DOWN BY A PATROL OF STRATOSPHERIC SHARK FIGHTERS. THEN BEGAN A FRANTIC CHASE ON LAND, WITH NASIR, A SERGEANT OF THE MAKHRAN LEVY CORPS, ONLY JUST SAVING BLAKE AND MORTIMER FROM A TRAP LAID BY OLRİK.



ALL AT ONCE A PIECE OF ROCK BREAKS OFF AND BLAKE IS THROWN OFF THE LEDGE!...

UNFORTUNATELY, DURING THE PURSUIT MORTIMER IS CAUGHT BY THE IMPERIALS. BUT BEFORE BEING CAPTURED HE SUCCESSFULLY HIDES THE PLANS OF THE SWORDFISH...



RAISING HIS PISTOLS, MORTIMER EMPTIES BOTH MAGAZINES TOWARDS THE PROJECTOR.

A CODED MESSAGE SENT BY MORTIMER WHILE IN CAPTIVITY ALLOWED BLAKE AND NASIR
TO LOCATE AND RECOVER THE PLANS...

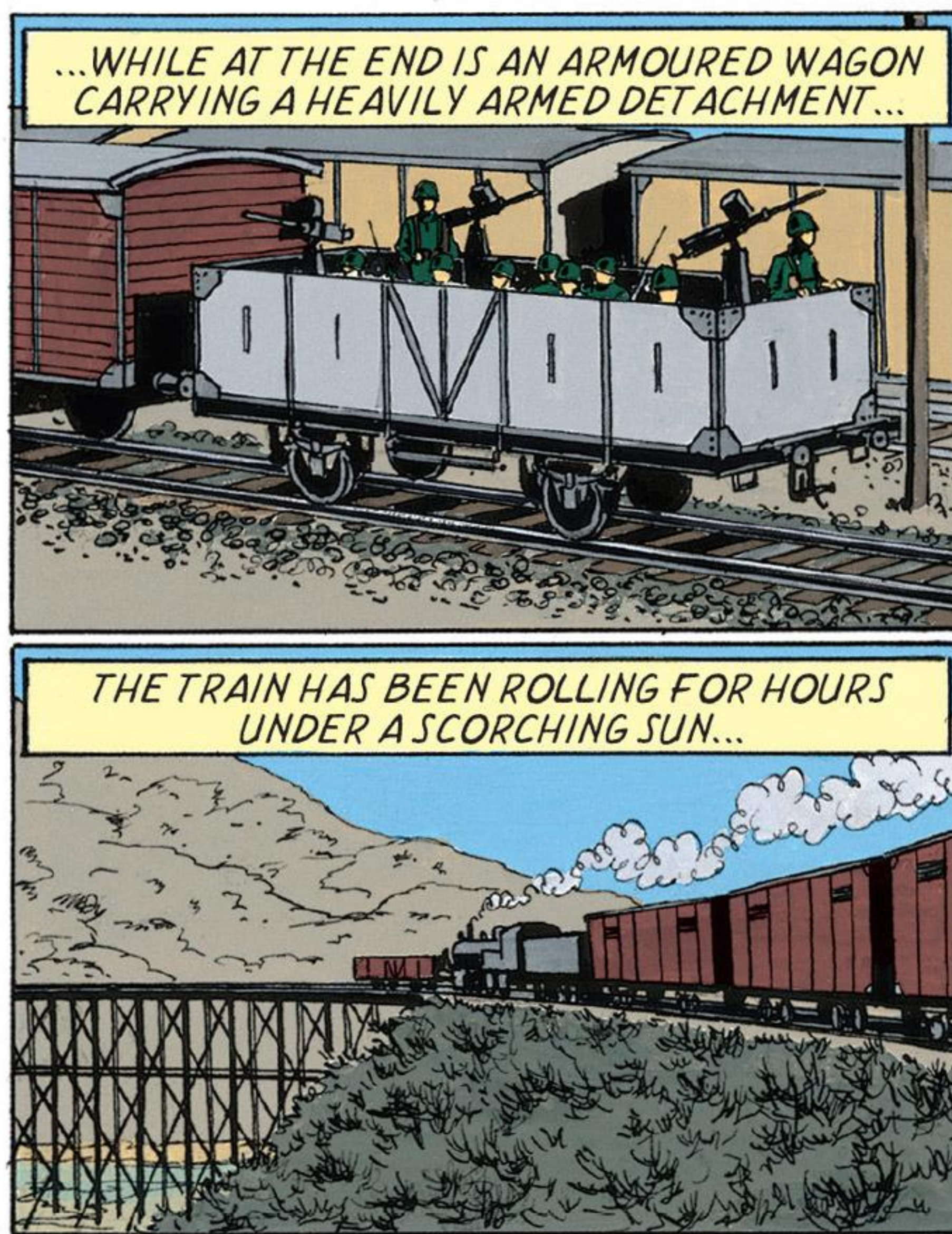
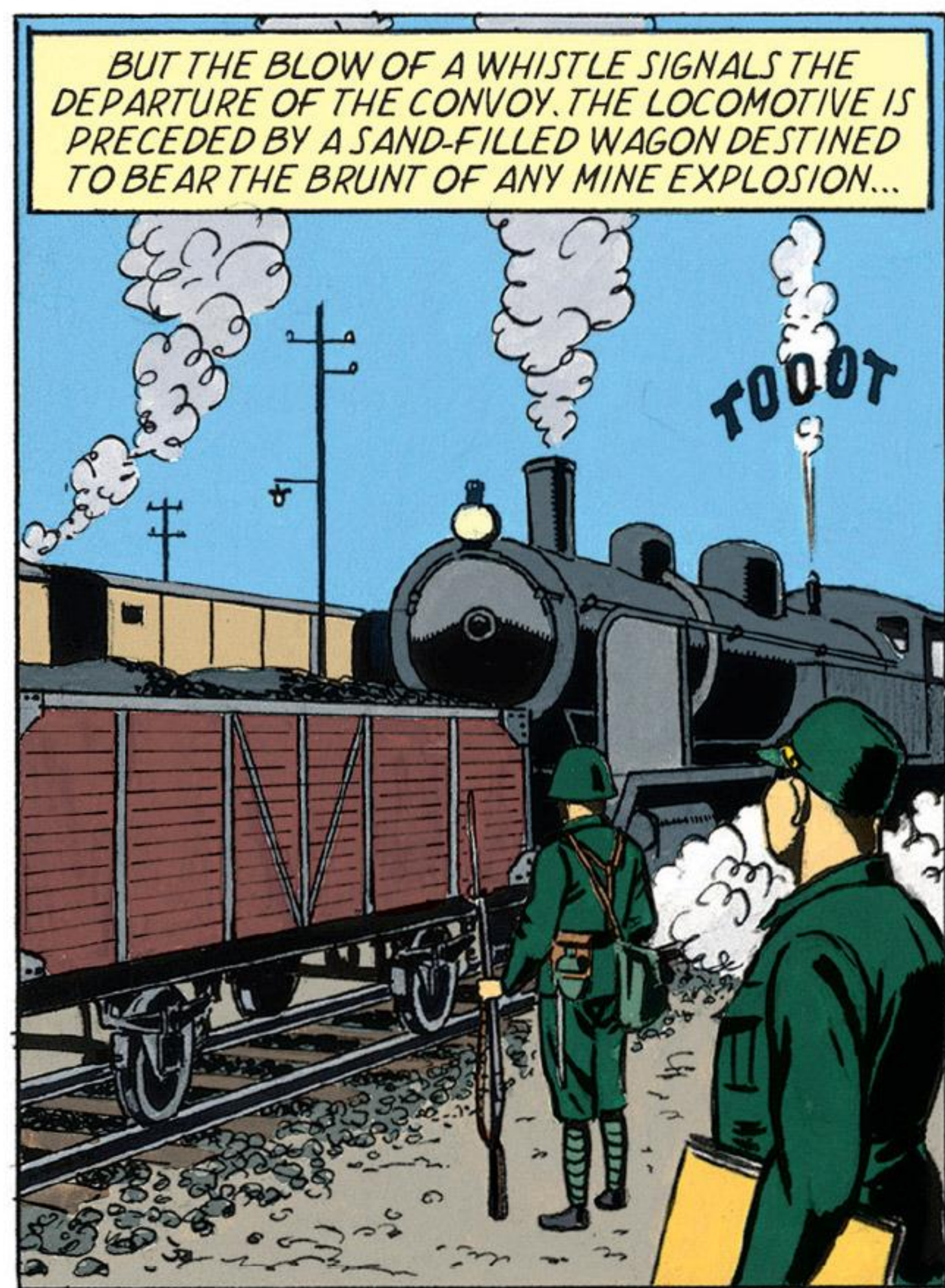
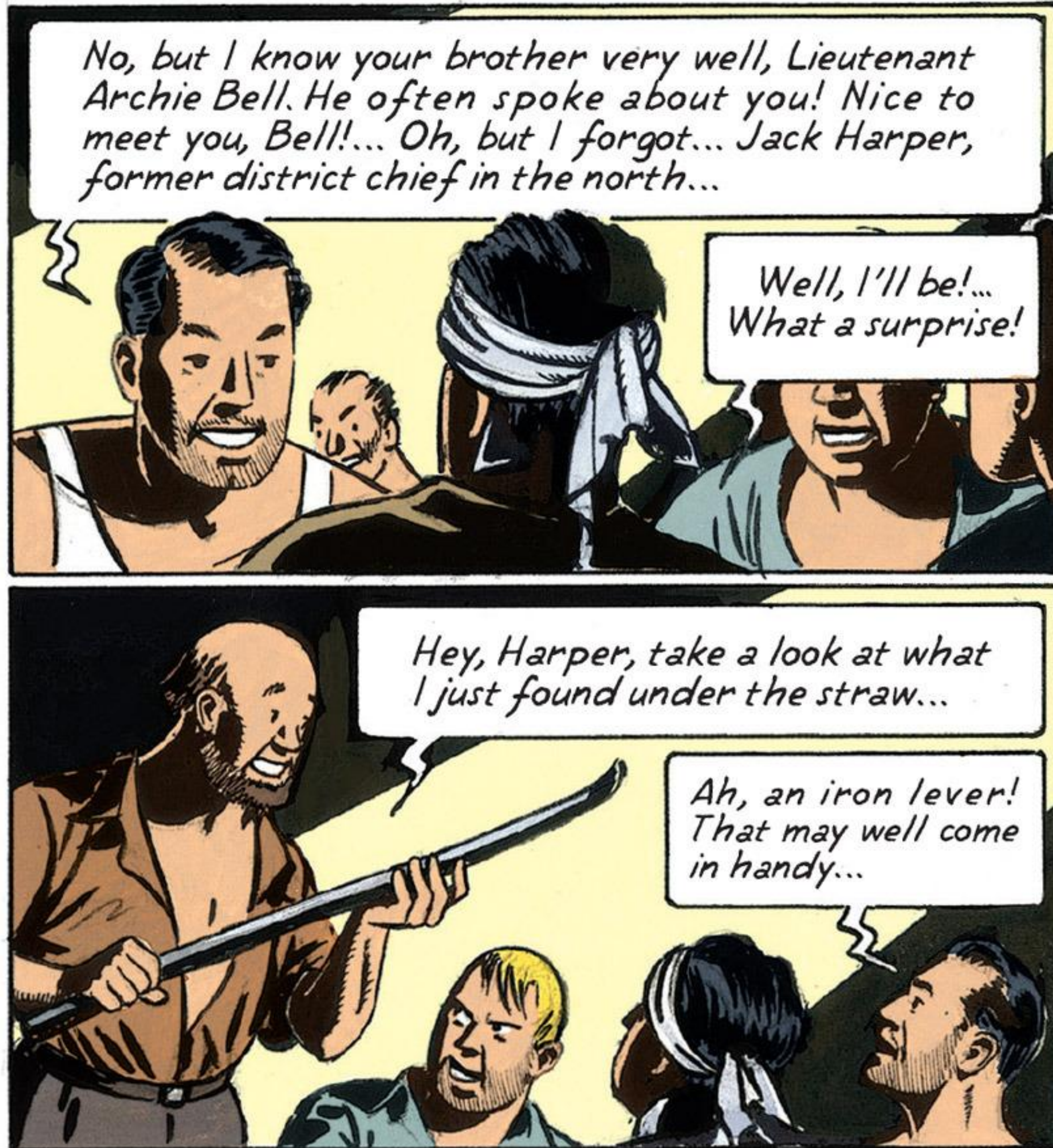
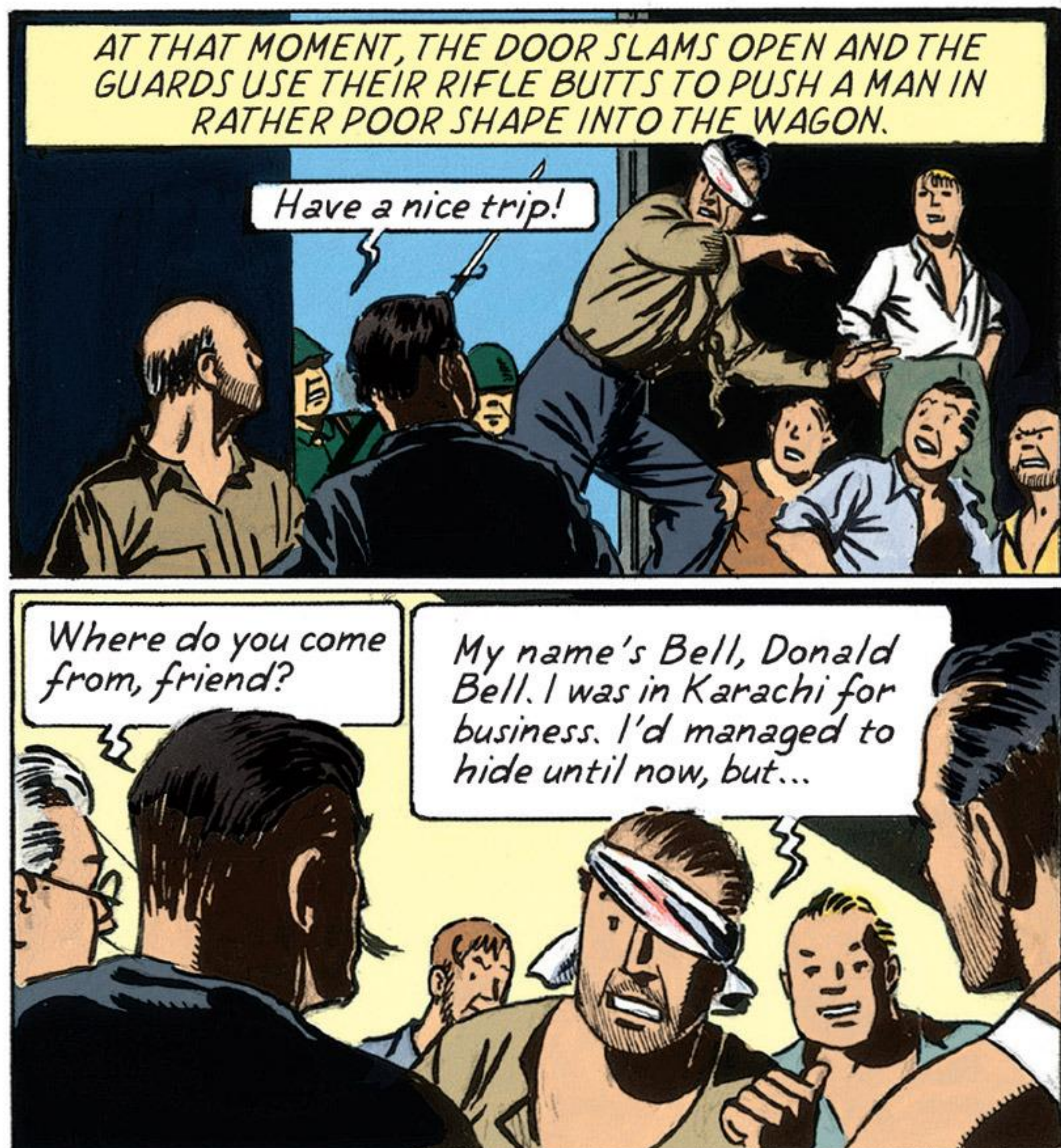


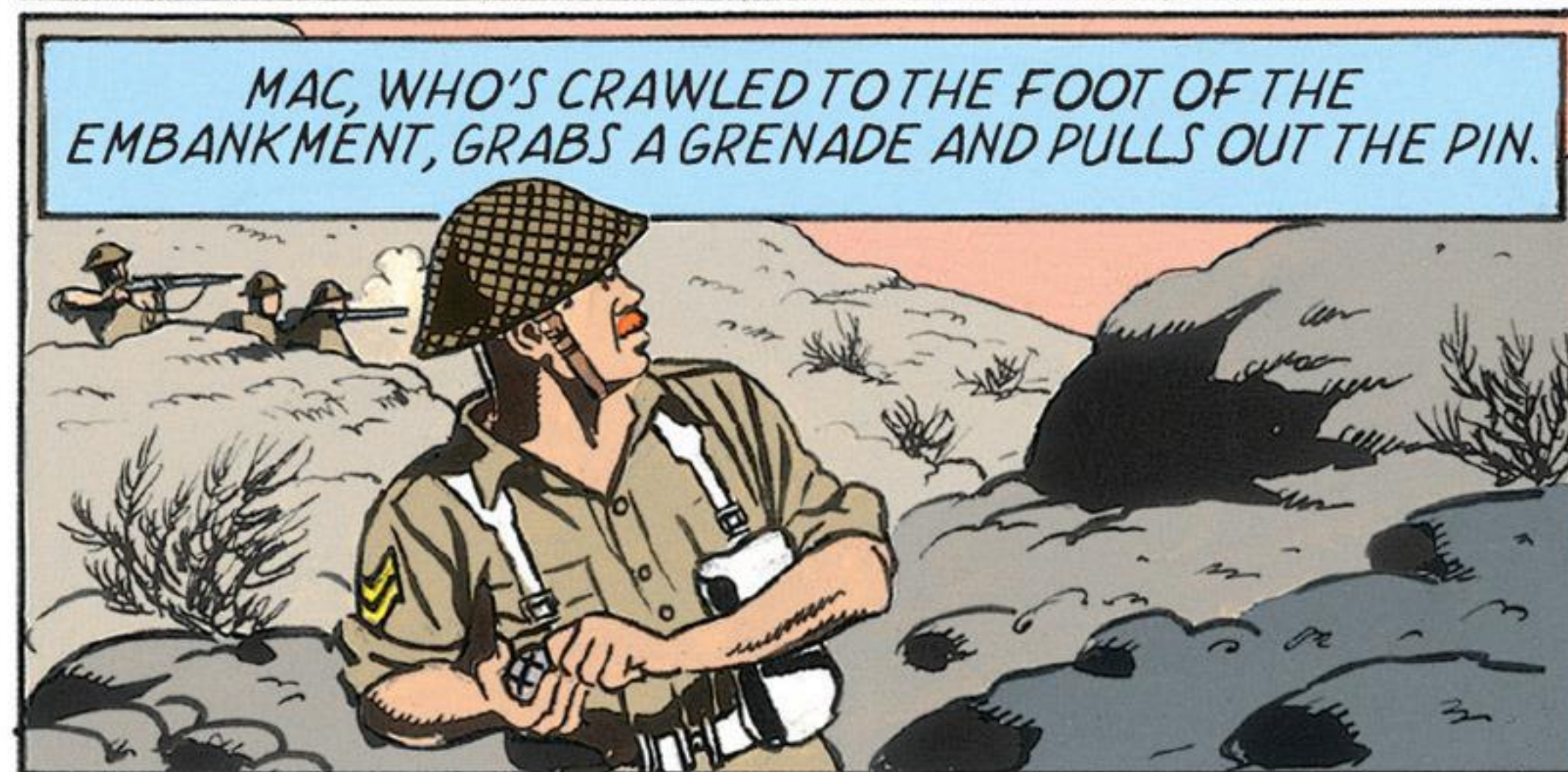
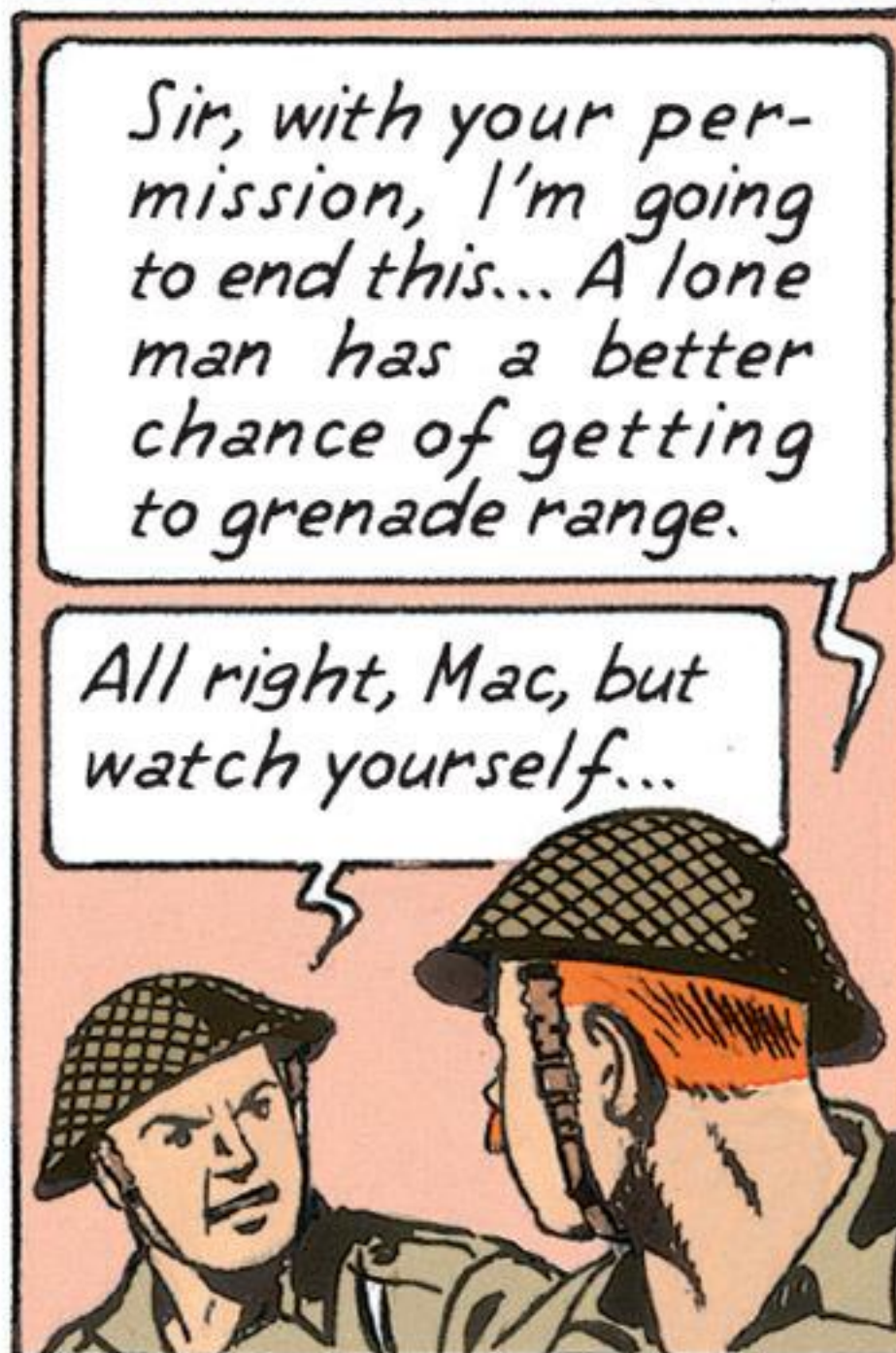
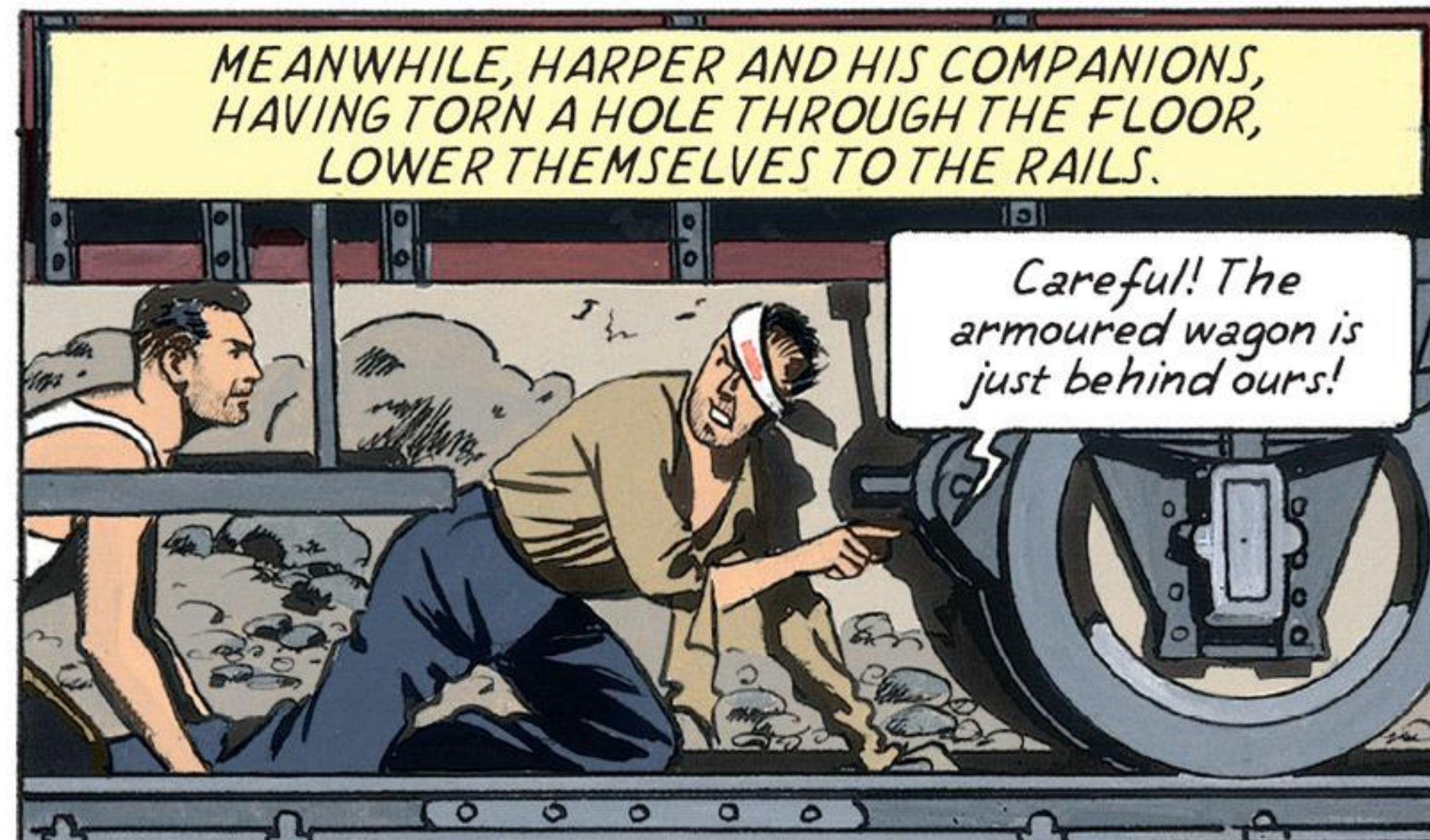
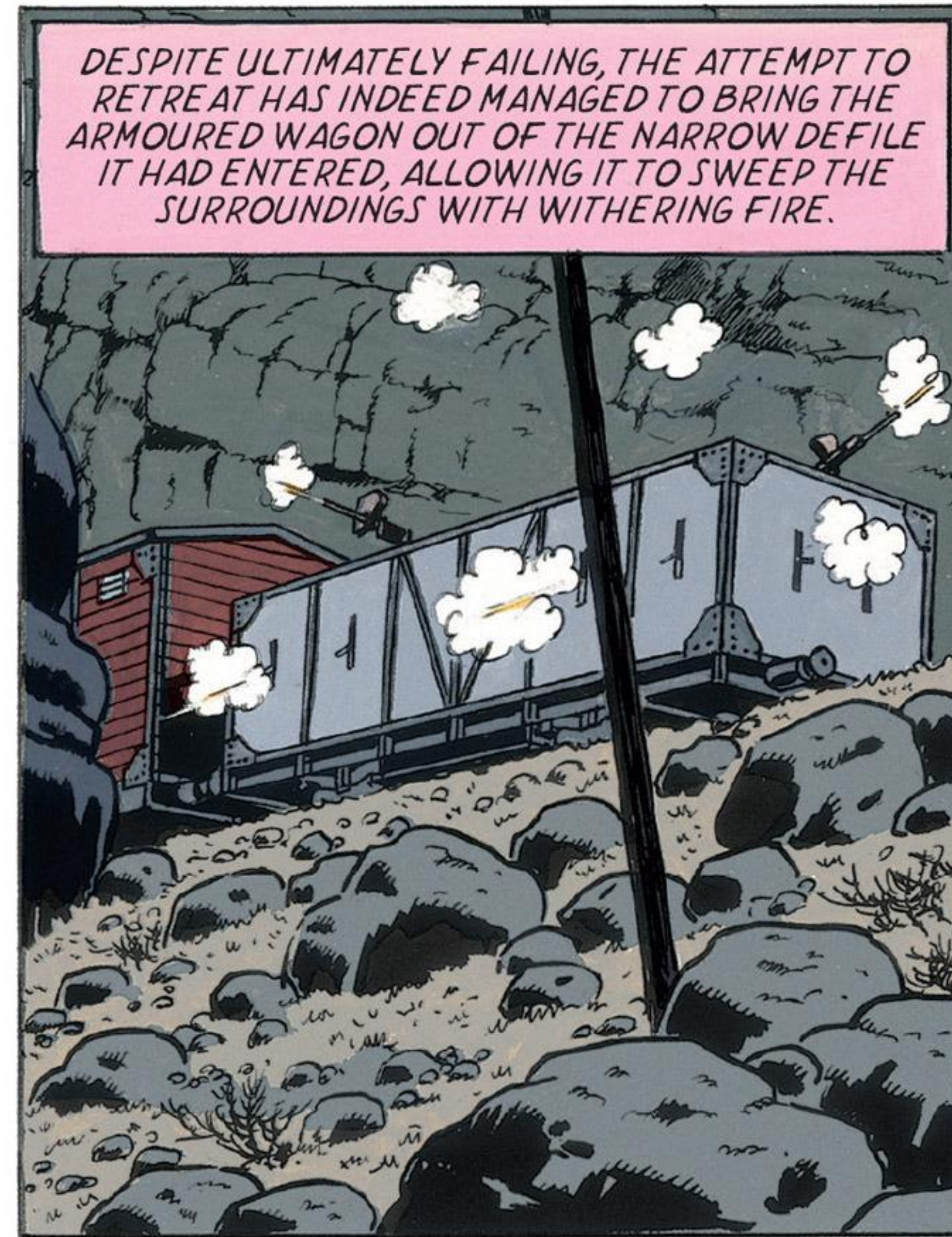
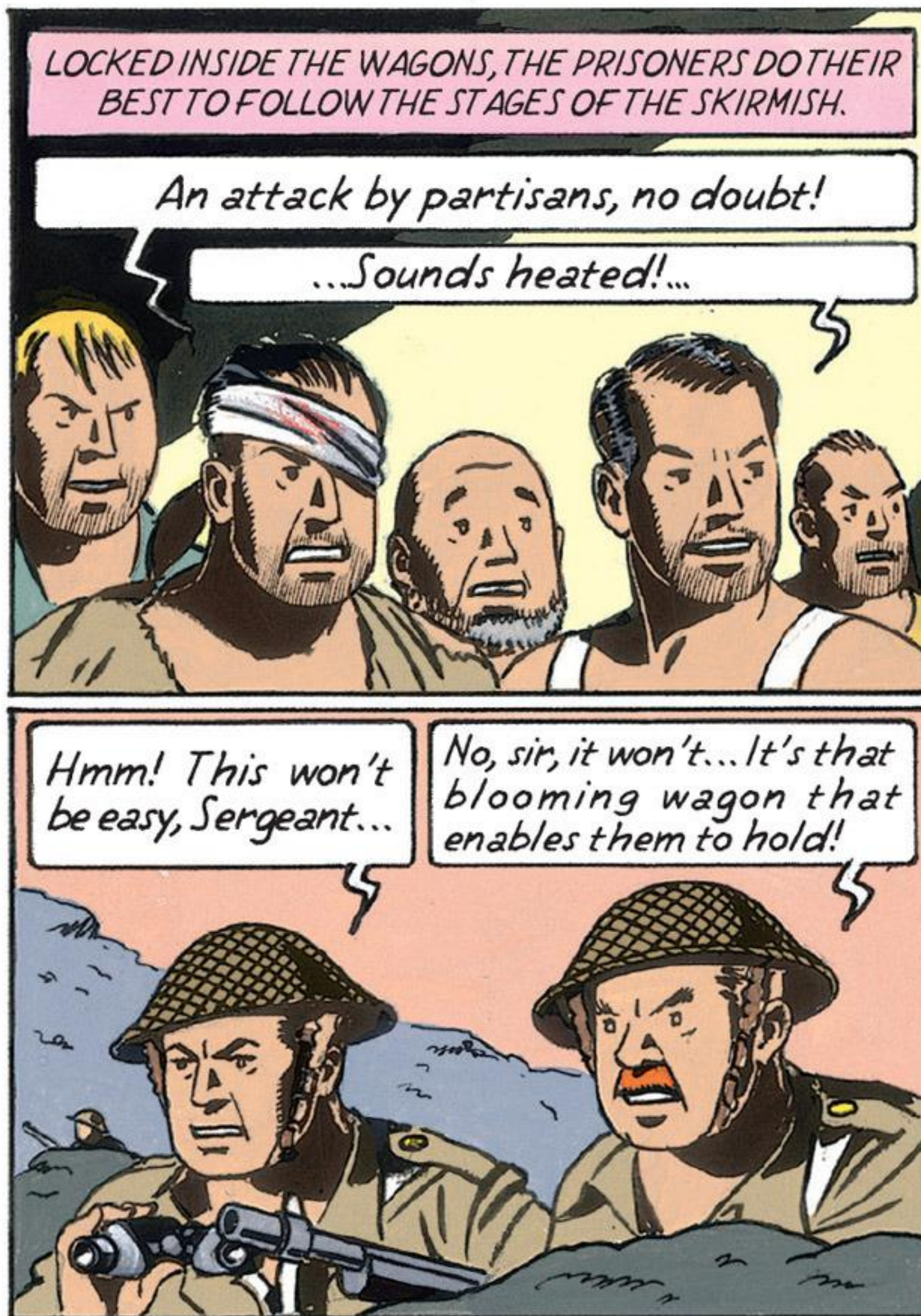
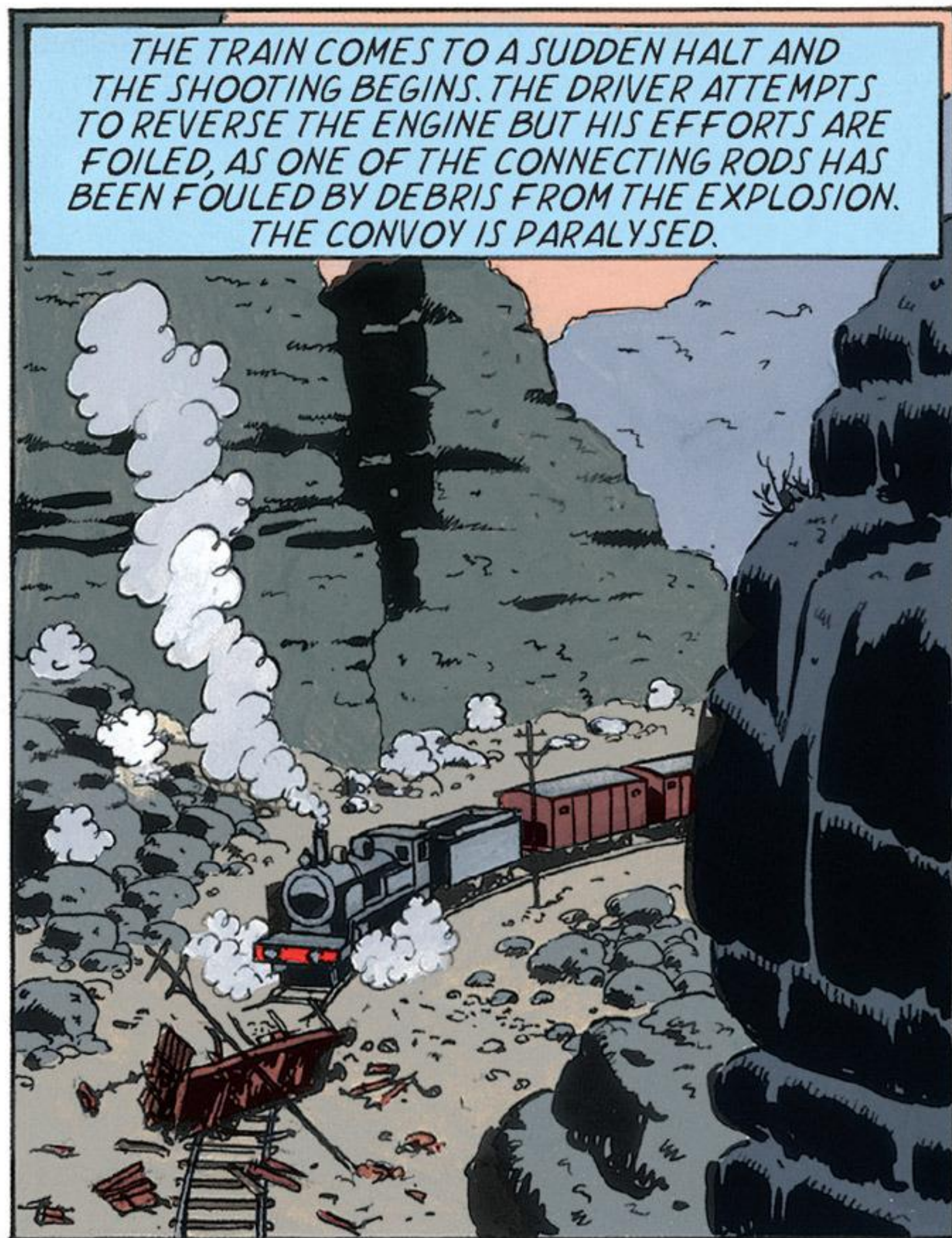
IN THE SKIES OVER LHASA, NEW CAPITAL OF THE GREAT WORLD EMPIRE, THE RED WING II, COLONEL OLRİK'S PERSONAL PLANE, HAS JUST APPEARED...

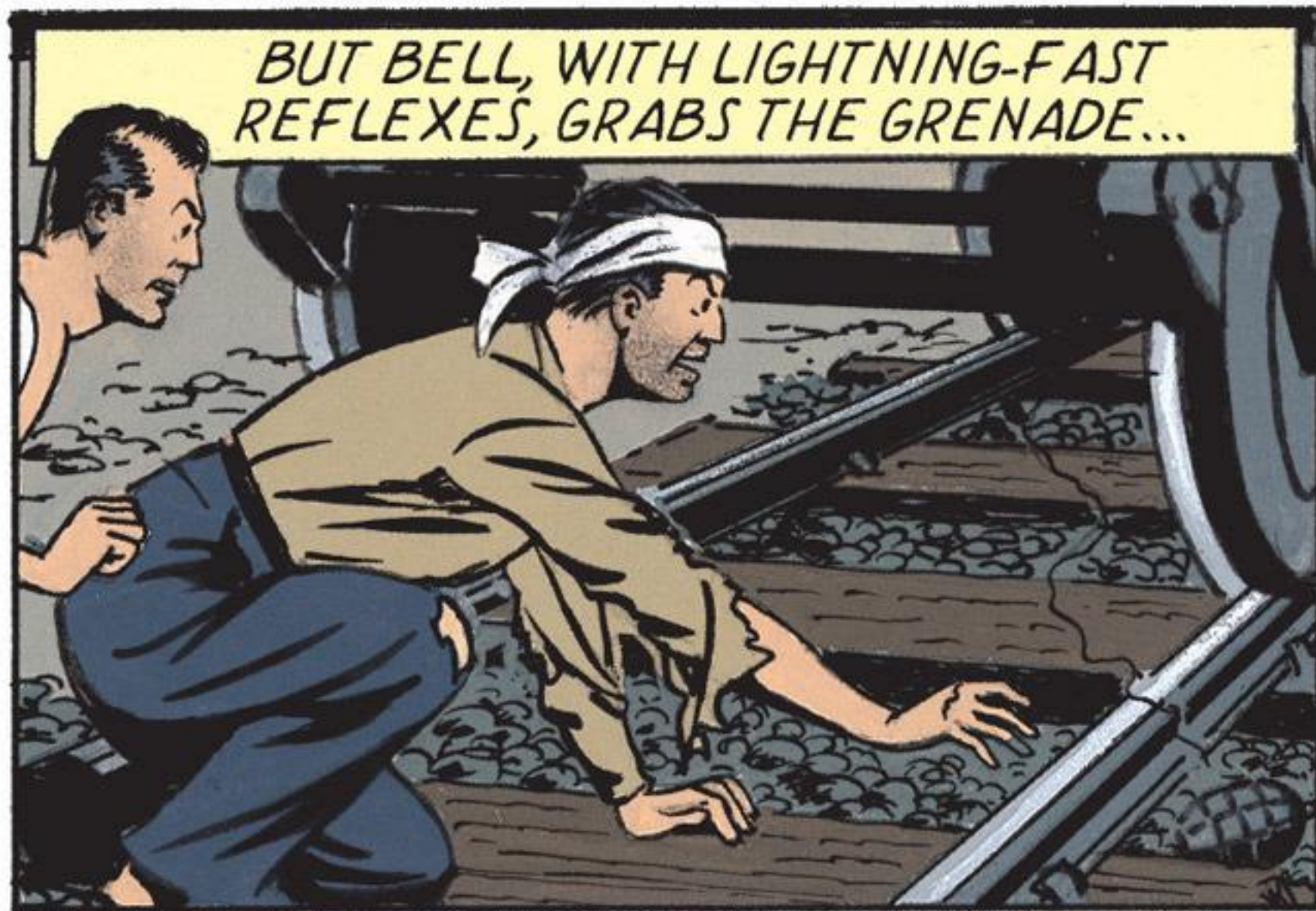
THE TWO MEN THEN ORGANISED MORTIMER'S ESCAPE, AND ALL THREE EVENTUALLY FOUND THEMSELVES ABOARD THE S2 SUBMARINE AS IT NARROWLY EVADED A DESTROYER SQUADRON...



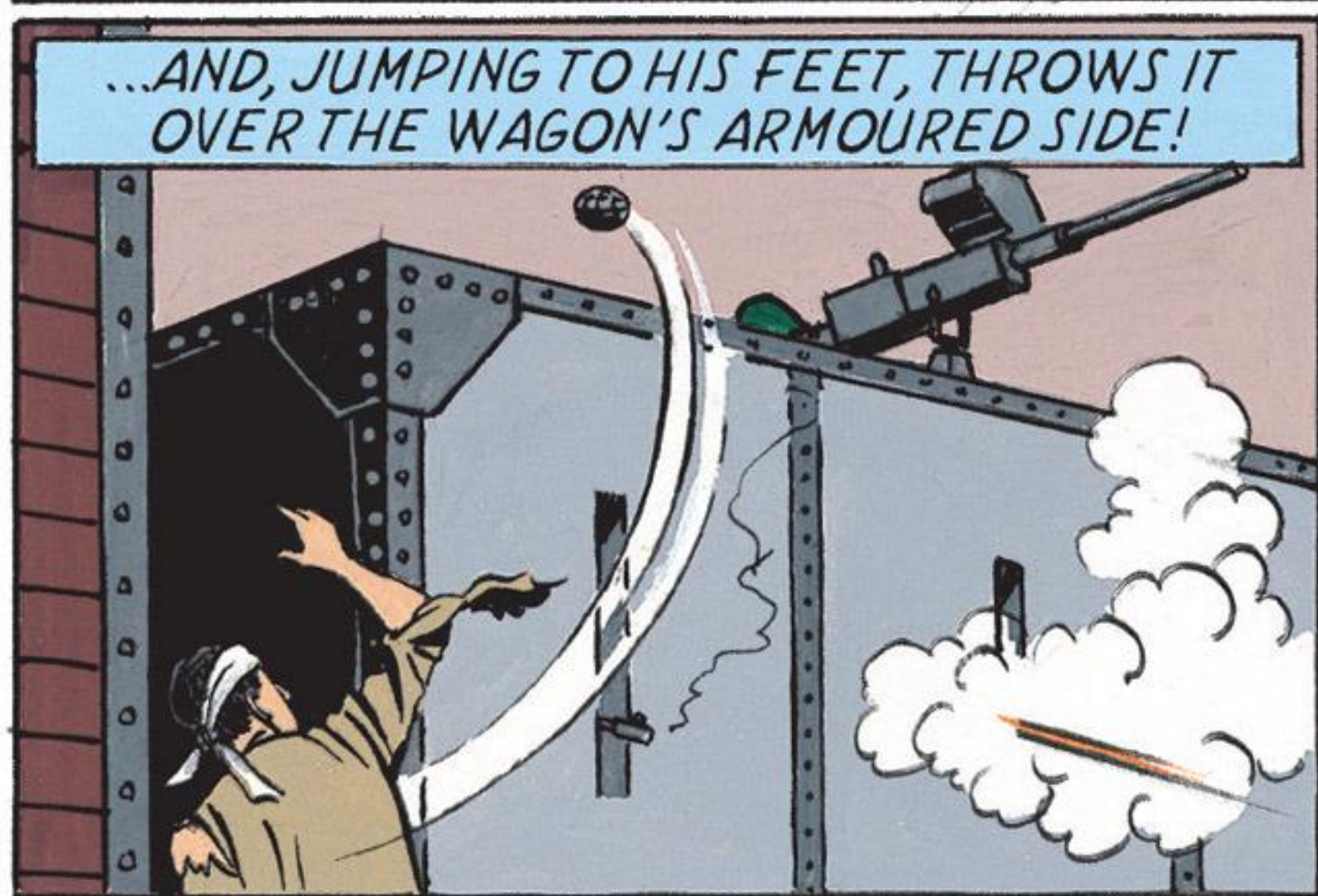
'WELL, WELL, AREN'T YOU THE ONE WHO WAS WORKING ON THE FENCE THE OTHER DAY?... ' SAID OLRİK SUDDENLY, STARING INQUISITIVELY AT NASİR.







BUT BELL, WITH LIGHTNING-FAST REFLEXES, GRABS THE GRENADE...



...AND, JUMPING TO HIS FEET, THROWS IT OVER THE WAGON'S ARMoured SIDE!



THE DEVASTATING EXPLOSION ELIMINATES THE ENTIRE DEFENSIVE FORCE INSTANTLY...



Forward!



AND THE COMMANDOS CHARGE...



Hurrah!

Good work, gentlemen!



Lieutenant, this is Donald Bell, the man of the hour!

My congratulations, sir! We really are in your debt. If you hadn't kept your cool, I'm afraid we might have had to fall back!

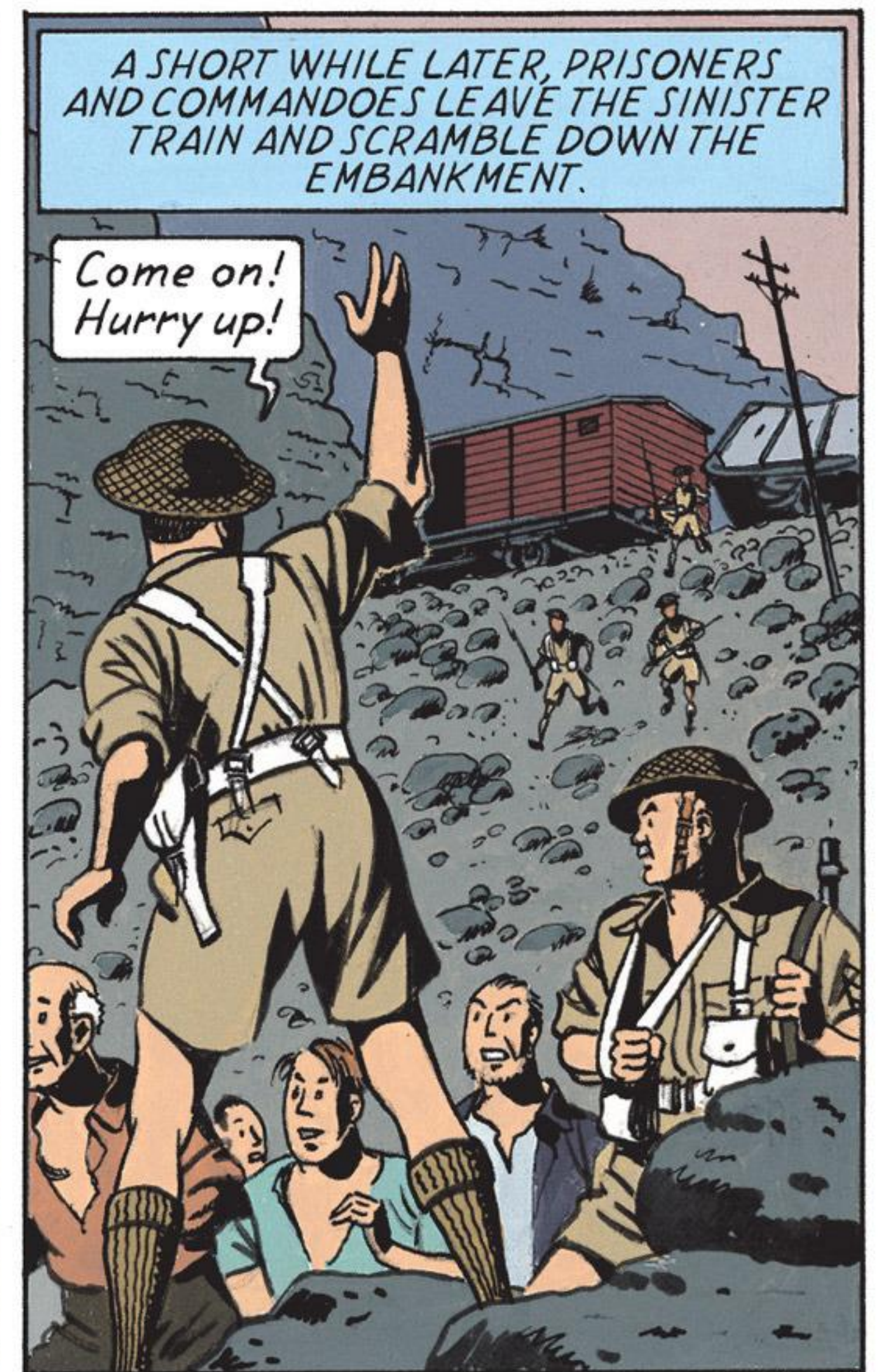
Bah! I didn't have much choice, Lieutenant.



MEANWHILE, THE COMMANDOS HAVE QUICKLY FREED THE PRISONERS FROM THE OTHER WAGONS.

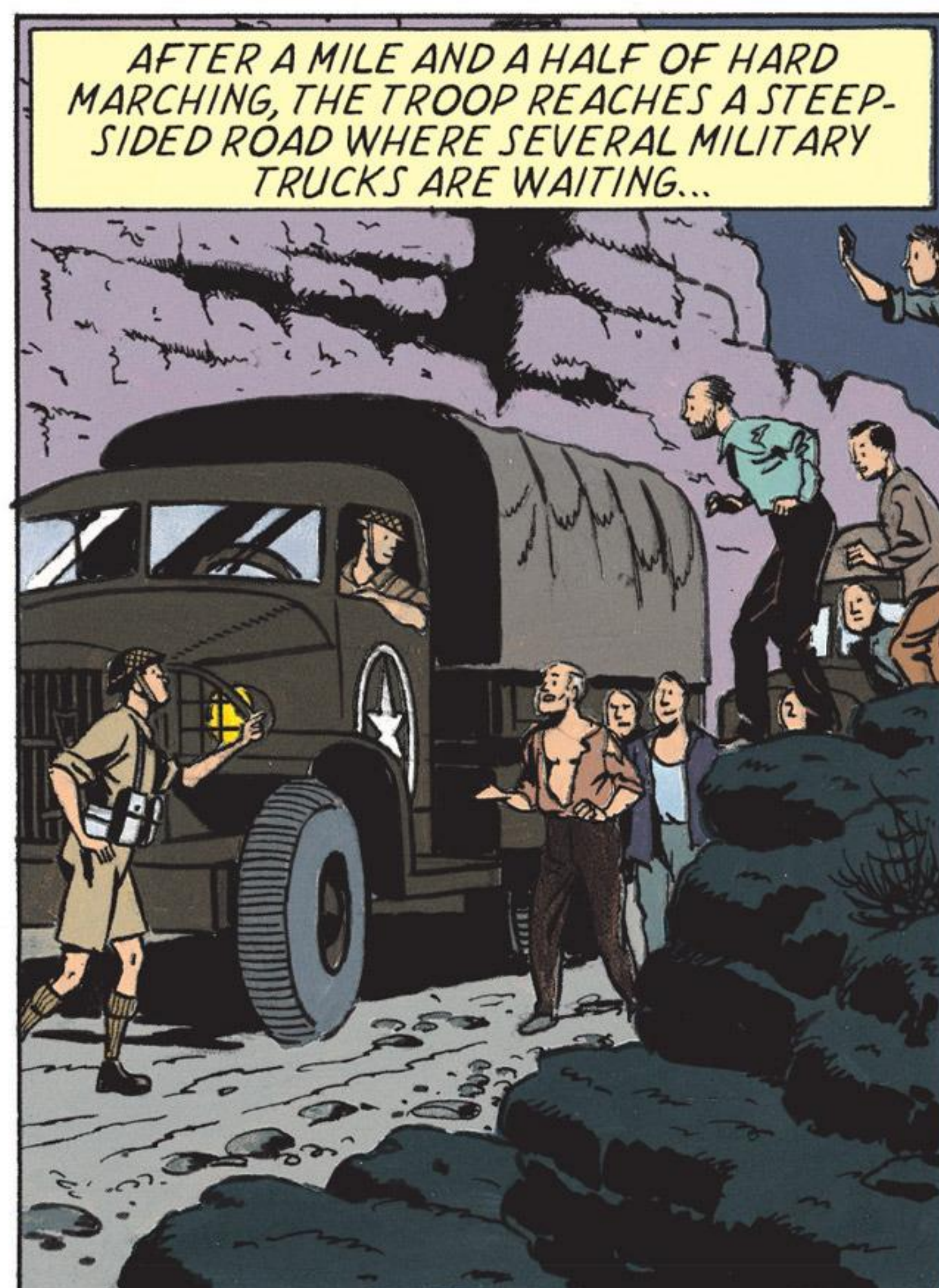
Well, Mac? The arm?

Nothing serious, sir! A mere scratch!

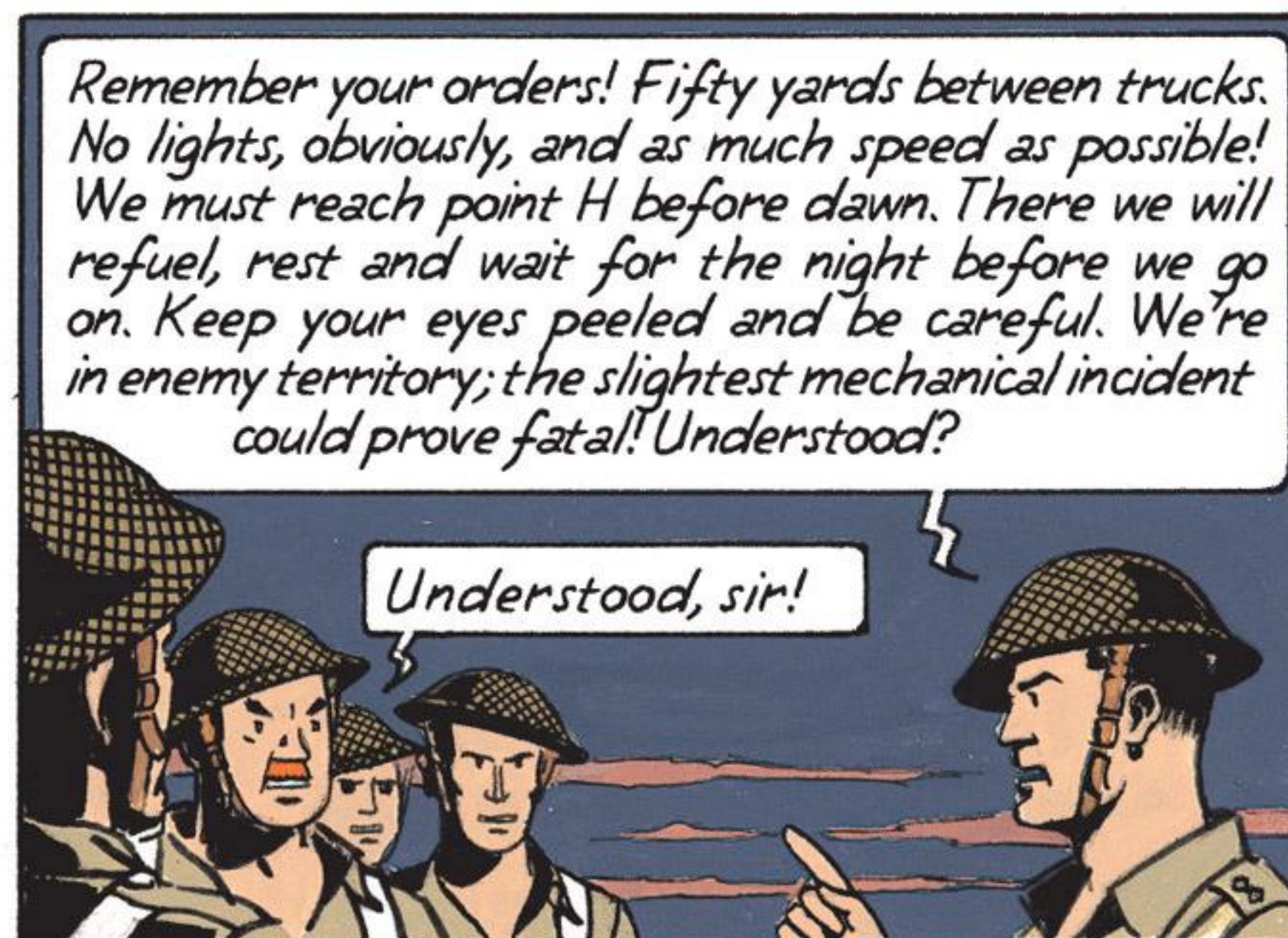


A SHORT WHILE LATER, PRISONERS AND COMMANDOS LEAVE THE SINISTER TRAIN AND SCRAMBLE DOWN THE EMBANKMENT.

Come on! Hurry up!



AFTER A MILE AND A HALF OF HARD MARCHING, THE TROOP REACHES A STEEP-SIDED ROAD WHERE SEVERAL MILITARY TRUCKS ARE WAITING...



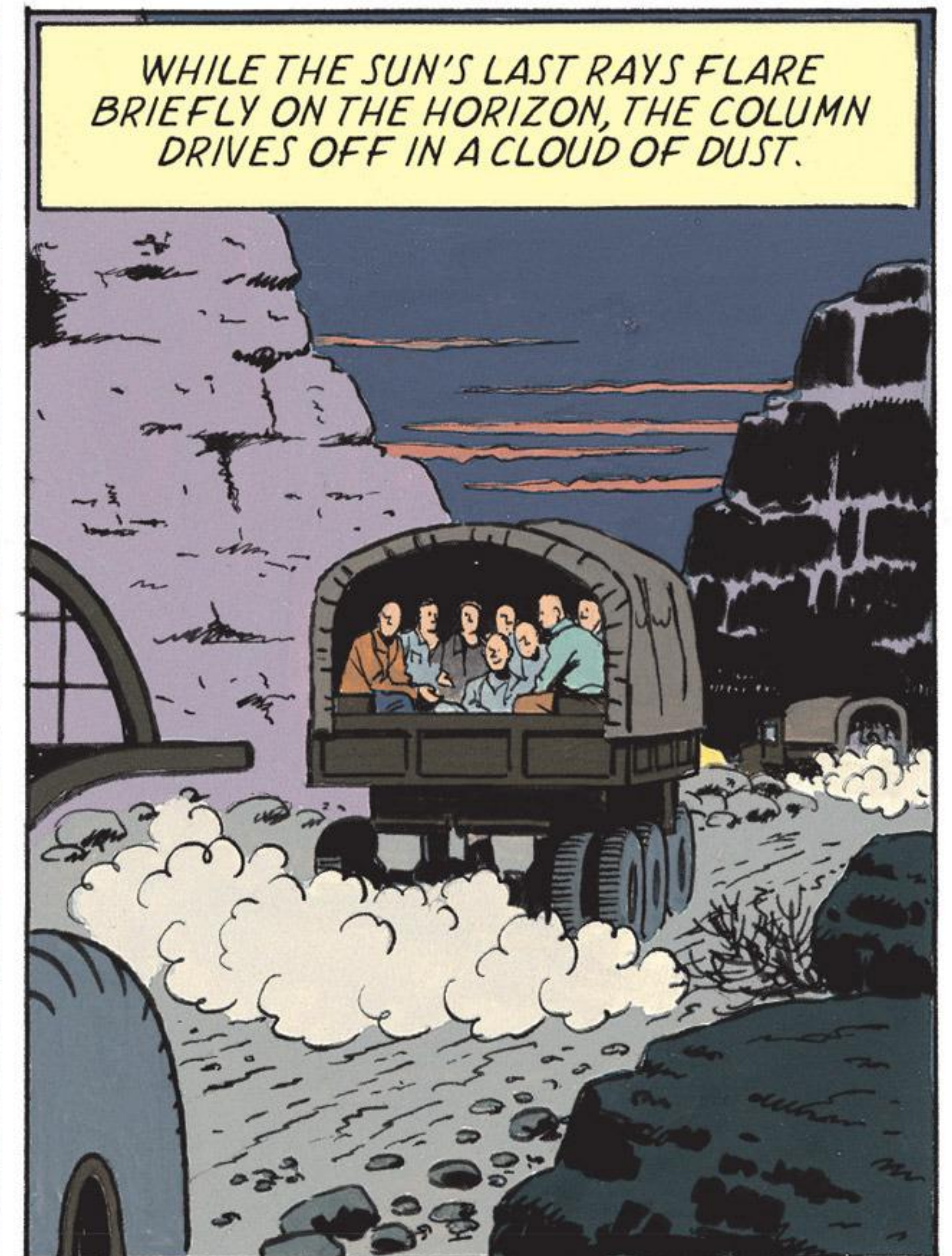
Remember your orders! Fifty yards between trucks. No lights, obviously, and as much speed as possible! We must reach point H before dawn. There we will refuel, rest and wait for the night before we go on. Keep your eyes peeled and be careful. We're in enemy territory; the slightest mechanical incident could prove fatal! Understood?

Understood, sir!



And now, Bell, on to freedom!

Heaven hears you, Jack!



WHILE THE SUN'S LAST RAYS FLARE BRIEFLY ON THE HORIZON, THE COLUMN DRIVES OFF IN A CLOUD OF DUST.

TWO DAYS LATER, AFTER A PERILOUS TREK, THE COMMANDO REACHES THE CLIFFS OF MAKRAN. THE TRUCKS ARE HIDDEN AND CAMOUFLAGED IN A SAFE SPOT THEN THE TROOP TRAVELS ON TOWARDS THE BASE, ON FOOT THIS TIME...



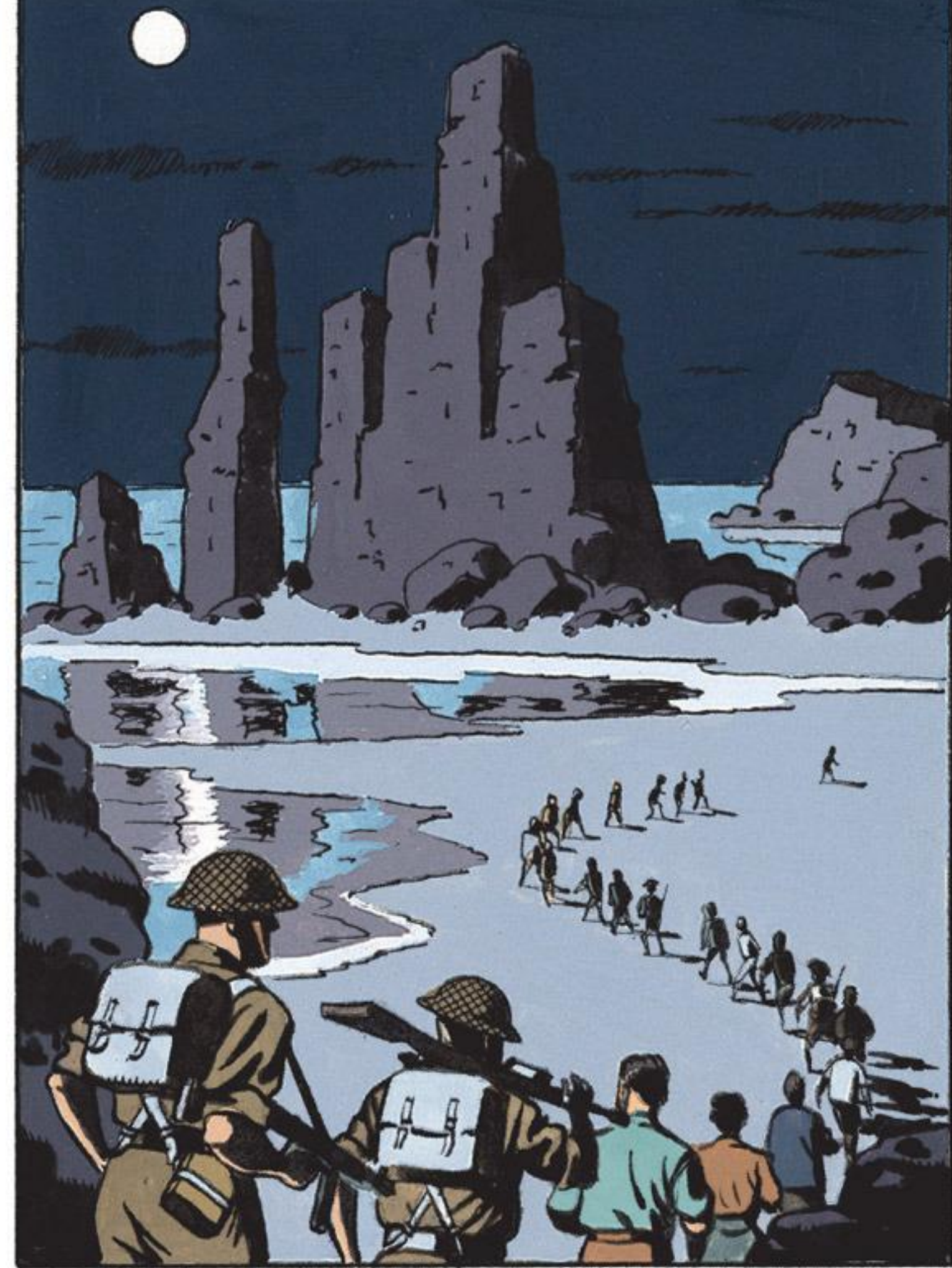
...BEFORE STOPPING AT NIGHTFALL AT THE SPOT WHERE BLAKE AND NASIR DISAPPEARED WHEN MORTIMER WAS CAPTURED.



Gentlemen, listen carefully to my instructions, as your lives depend on it!... We are going to cross to the entrance of our base, which on this side is only accessible at low tide. You are therefore going to follow in single file, and very precisely, the path I am going to take. My men will install themselves among you for added safety. Anyone who deviates from the trail will inevitably fall into the extremely dangerous quicksand that guard the area surrounding that rock you see over there.



AND SLOWLY, CAUTIOUSLY, THE MEN START WALKING.



HAVING SAFELY NAVIGATED THE TREACHEROUS AREA, THE LIEUTENANT STOPS BEFORE ONE OF THE MANY CRACKS THAT RUN THROUGH THE ROCK.



Is everyone here?

Yes, sir!

WALKING TO THE BACK OF THE CRACK, THE OFFICER HALTS BEFORE THE INVISIBLE BARRIER FORMED BY A CAESIUM-BASED ELECTRIC EYE AND BEGINS TRACING MYSTERIOUS SIGNS IN THE AIR.



BY INTERCEPTING THE INVISIBLE BEAMS AT A PREDETERMINED RHYTHM, HE FORMS THE COMMANDOS' IDENTIFICATION SIGNAL ON THE CONTROL PANEL OF THE GUARD STATION.



Hello! This is guard station - Makran sector. Commando at door one. Everything normal. Open and turn the lights on!

IMMEDIATELY, THERE IS A FAINT CLICK AND THE ROCK FACE THAT WAS PROTECTED BY THE INVISIBLE BEAMS RISES, UNCOVERING AN ILLUMINATED PASSAGE...



This way!

THE GROUP ENTER IT AND EMERGE INTO A HUGE CAVE, BRILLIANTLY LIT AND FILLED WITH THE MURMUR OF WATER...



By Jove, Bell! What a prodigious sight! Look over there!...



Yes, yes, but don't get too close!...

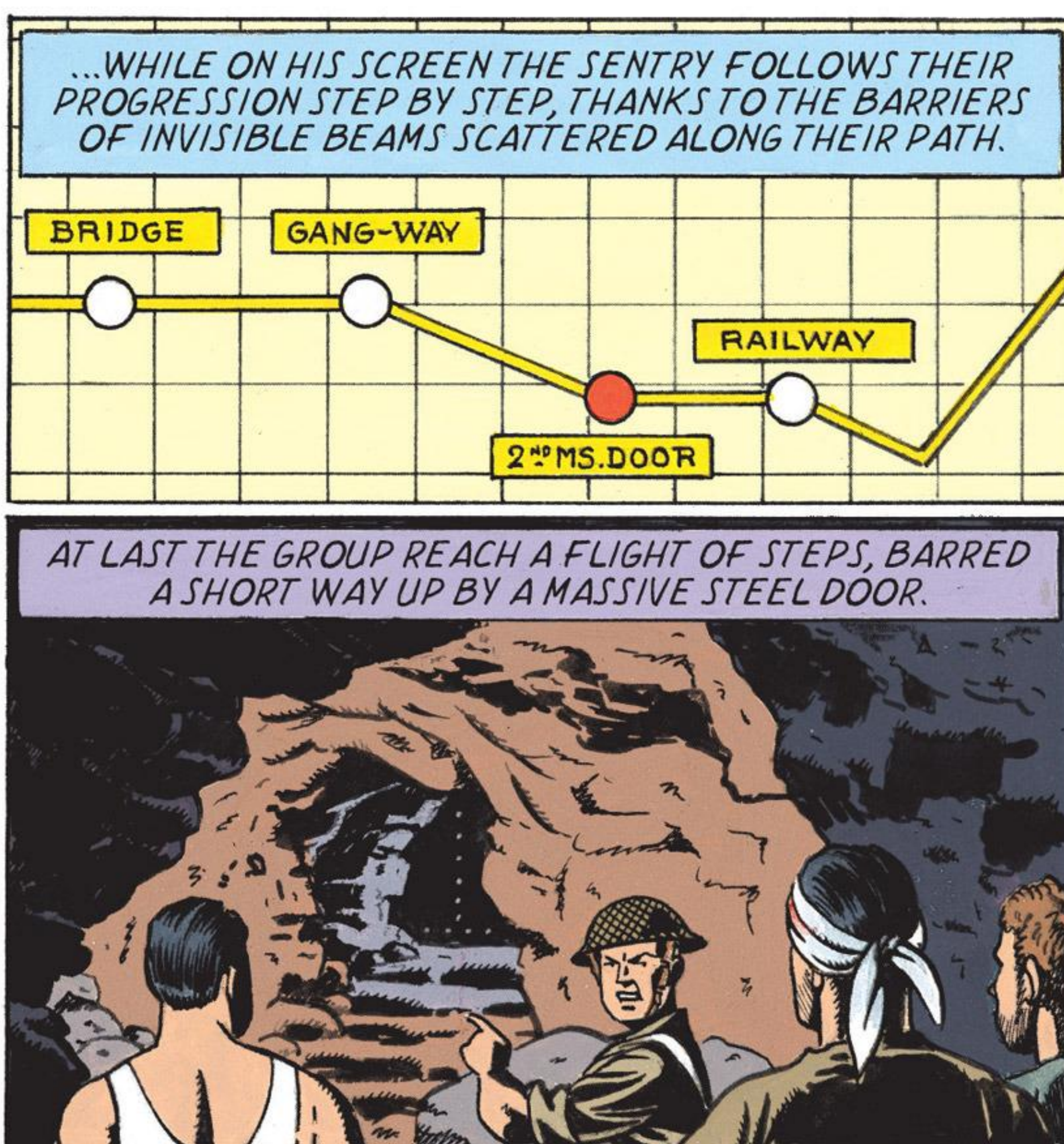
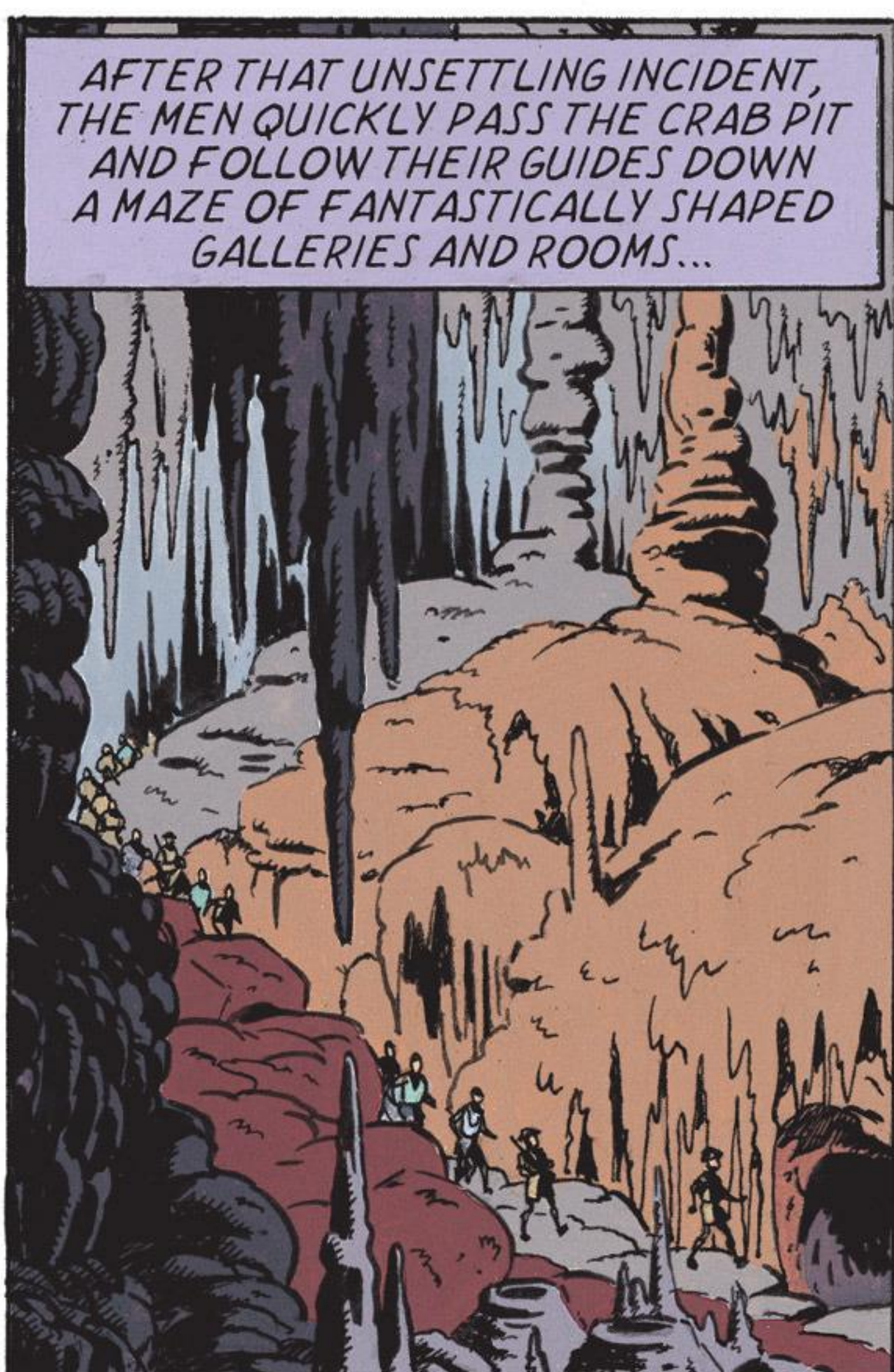
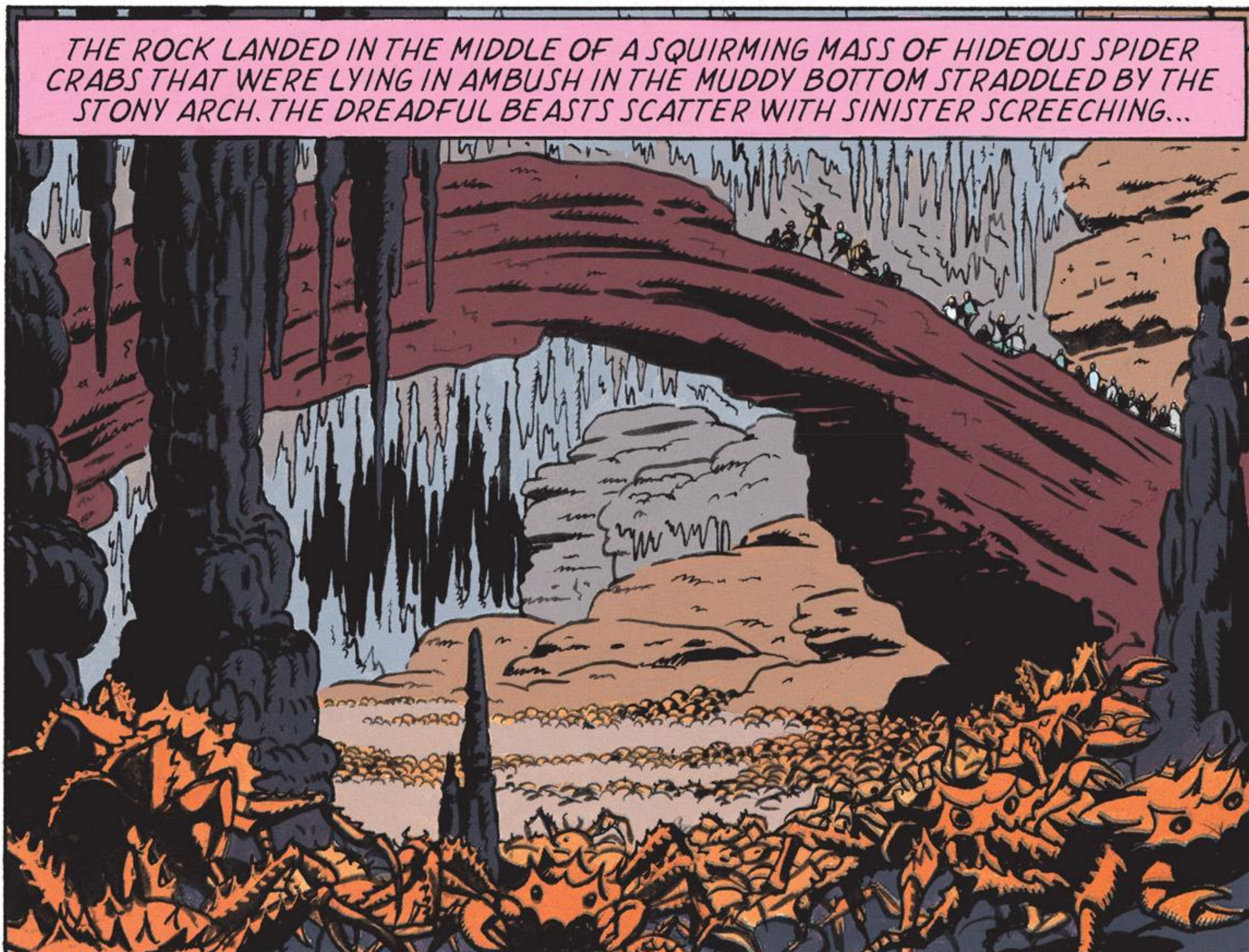
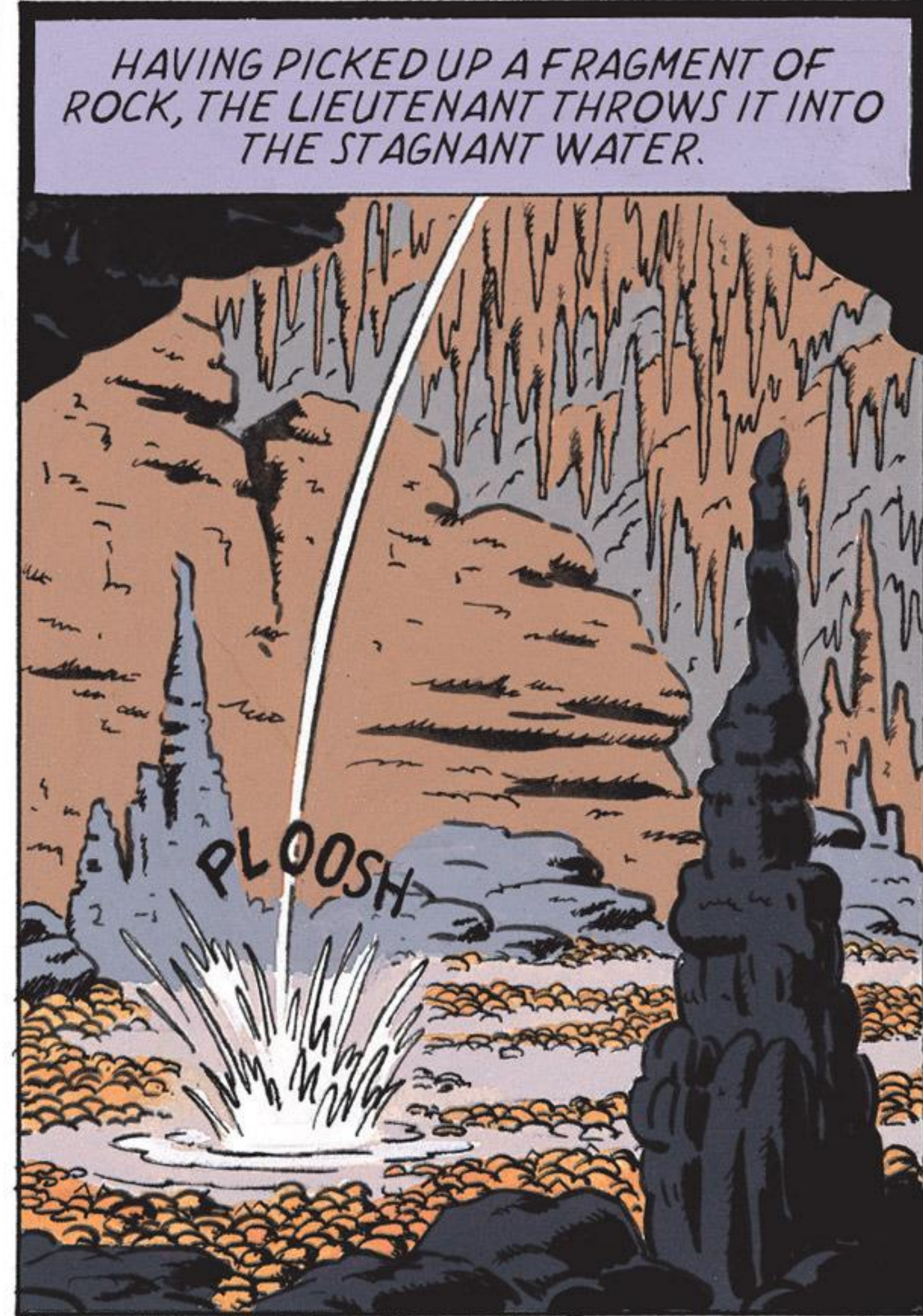
Hey! Be careful!... The ground is treacherous and...



AT THAT INSTANT, HARPER'S FOOT SLIPS ON THE SLIMY ROCK...



Jack!!!



AS THE MEN TAKE THEIR SEATS IN THE CARRIAGES OF THE ELECTRIC TRAIN, LIEUTENANT BRADY EXCHANGES A FEW WORDS WITH THE DRIVER.

Nice to see you again, sir. We were starting to fear the worst back at base...

I imagine you were; but it was no walk in the park! The buggers are starting to get organised...

THE TRAIN GETS UNDERWAY...

Go on, Phil!

...AND SPEEDS OFF TOWARDS THE HEART OF THE SECRET BASE.

INSIDE THE CARRIAGES, THE MEN IMMEDIATELY ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION...

I must say, Lieutenant, this is like a dream!

A hundred fathoms under the sea, gentlemen...

Where are we right now?

What?...

You mean...?

Exactly. At the moment we're travelling at 40 miles per hour underneath the Strait of Hormuz...

Incredible!... And where are we heading to?...

Simply towards Ras Musandam.

Fantastic!... And this tunnel was excavated?

Oh no! There was already a sort of gallery formed by God knows what kind of geological convulsion; but it had to be converted, drained, consolidated, or widened in some sections. It wasn't an easy job, believe you me!

...Yes, gentlemen!... From the cliffs of Makran to the rocks of the Arabian Peninsula: 38 miles below the sea!

Blimey!

Tell me, it's sturdy and safe, right? 'Cause I can't swim!

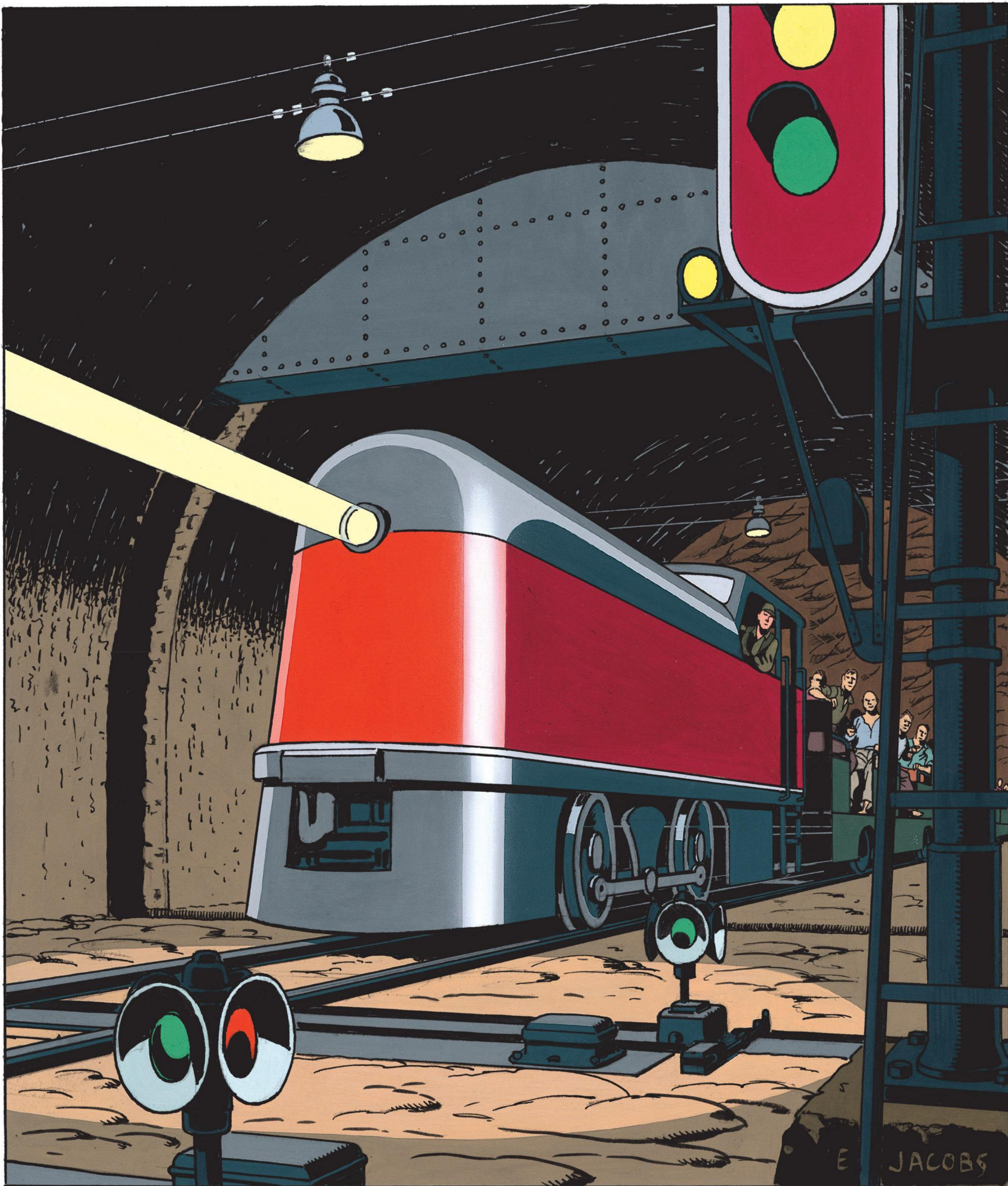
BUT WHILE THE MEN CHAT AWAY, THE TRAIN HAS KEPT GOING AND IS NOW ARRIVING AT THE BASE'S ENTRANCE PROPER...

...WHERE THE ENORMOUS STEEL GATE LIFTS UP TO ALLOW IT PASSAGE. SLOWING DOWN, THE TRAIN ENTERS THE SPACE...

...AND KEEPS GOING TOWARDS THE CENTRAL HALL. THE SENTRY, MEANWHILE, CONTACTS THE BASE'S COMMAND POST...

Hello! Hello! This is guard station - Makran sector...

...Lieutenant Brady's commando has just returned. Mission accomplished!... The men are being directed to the central hall...



SLOWING DOWN, THE TRAIN PASSES BENEATH THE MASSIVE STEEL GATE THAT HAS JUST RISEN TO ALLOW IT PASSAGE TOWARDS THE VERY HEART OF THE SECRET BASE!...

AT THE BASE'S C.P., SIR WILLIAM GRAY, CAPTAIN BLAKE AND PROFESSOR MORTIMER ARE MEETING...

Well, my dear fellow, this is good news!

Excellent news, sir. I'm going to take a closer look at the new contingent. Coming, Mortimer?

No, too much to do. I shall defer to your judgement, Blake.

Really, Bell, I can't believe it. It's all so extraordinary!

And yet it's only the beginning of the adventure, Harper!

Mission accomplished, sir!

I'm glad to see you again, Brady. We were starting to worry about...

BLAKE HAS ENTERED THE HALL AND IS SPEAKING WITH BRADY, BUT A CRY OF SURPRISE INTERRUPTS THE CONVERSATION...

Blake!!!

Harper?!
Surely not!...
You? Here?!

By Jove, Harper, it's such a pleasure to see you again!

Ah, old fellow! I almost never made it here!!!

Blake, allow me to introduce my friend Donald Bell from the Atomic Energy Commission, to whom I owe my continued existence.

Pleased to meet you, Captain.

Not at all. Would you believe it, old boy, not only did he ensure the success of your commando raid but Bell also saved me from a hideous death when I lost my footing on the slippery ground and was about to fall into the crab pit!...

How are you, Mr Bell? I believe Professor Mortimer will be particularly thankful for your knowledge of nuclear physics... But Harper said he owed you his life...?

Oh, Harper exaggerates ...

Well, you sound like a choice recruit! But you're wounded... You need to see a doctor.

Oh, it's not worth it, I assure you! A clean bandage will do.

Brady, these men are too tired for me to speak to them now. Make sure they're given decent meals and clean clothes, then take them to section T. Rooms have been prepared. Put Bell and Harper together.

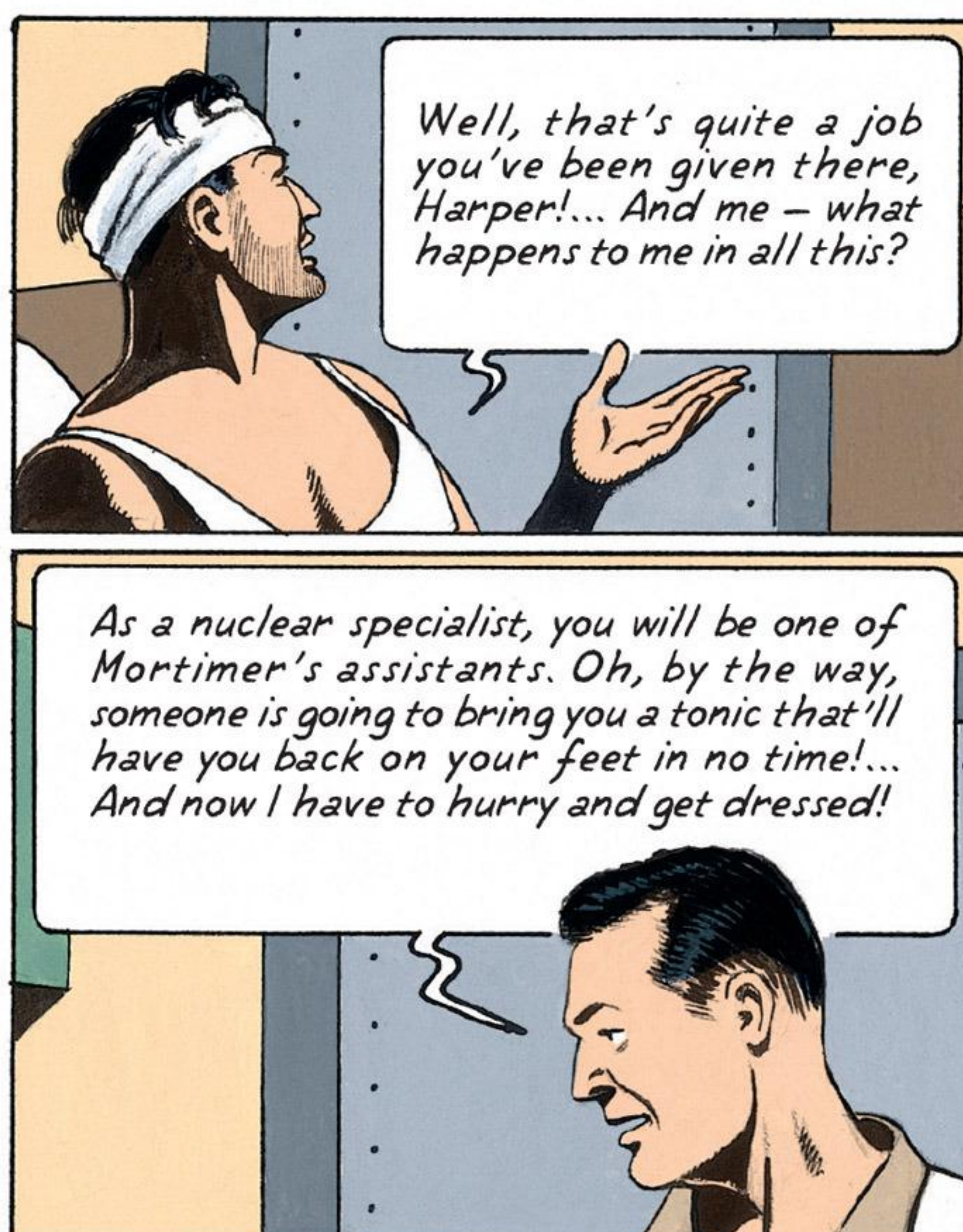
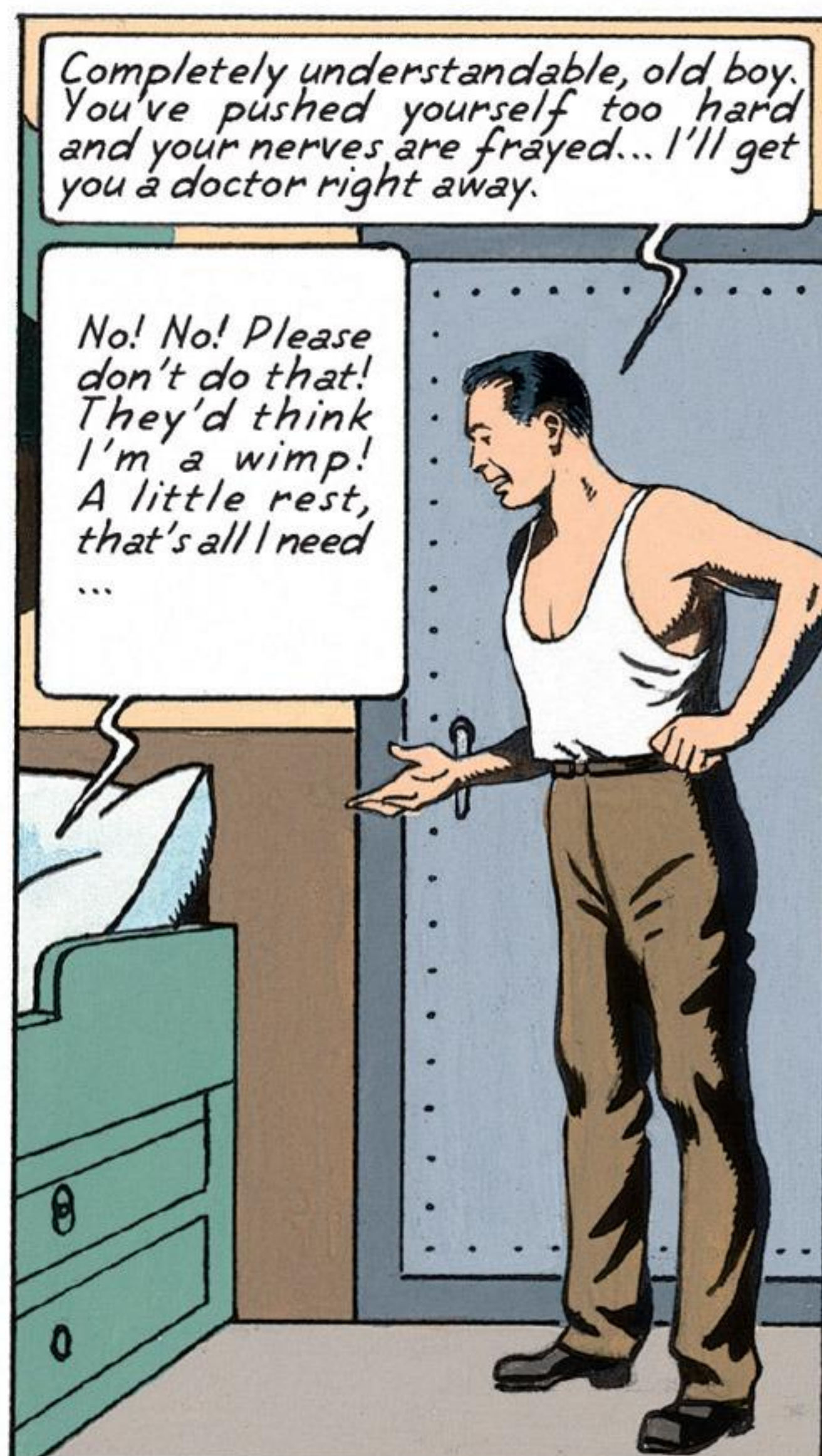
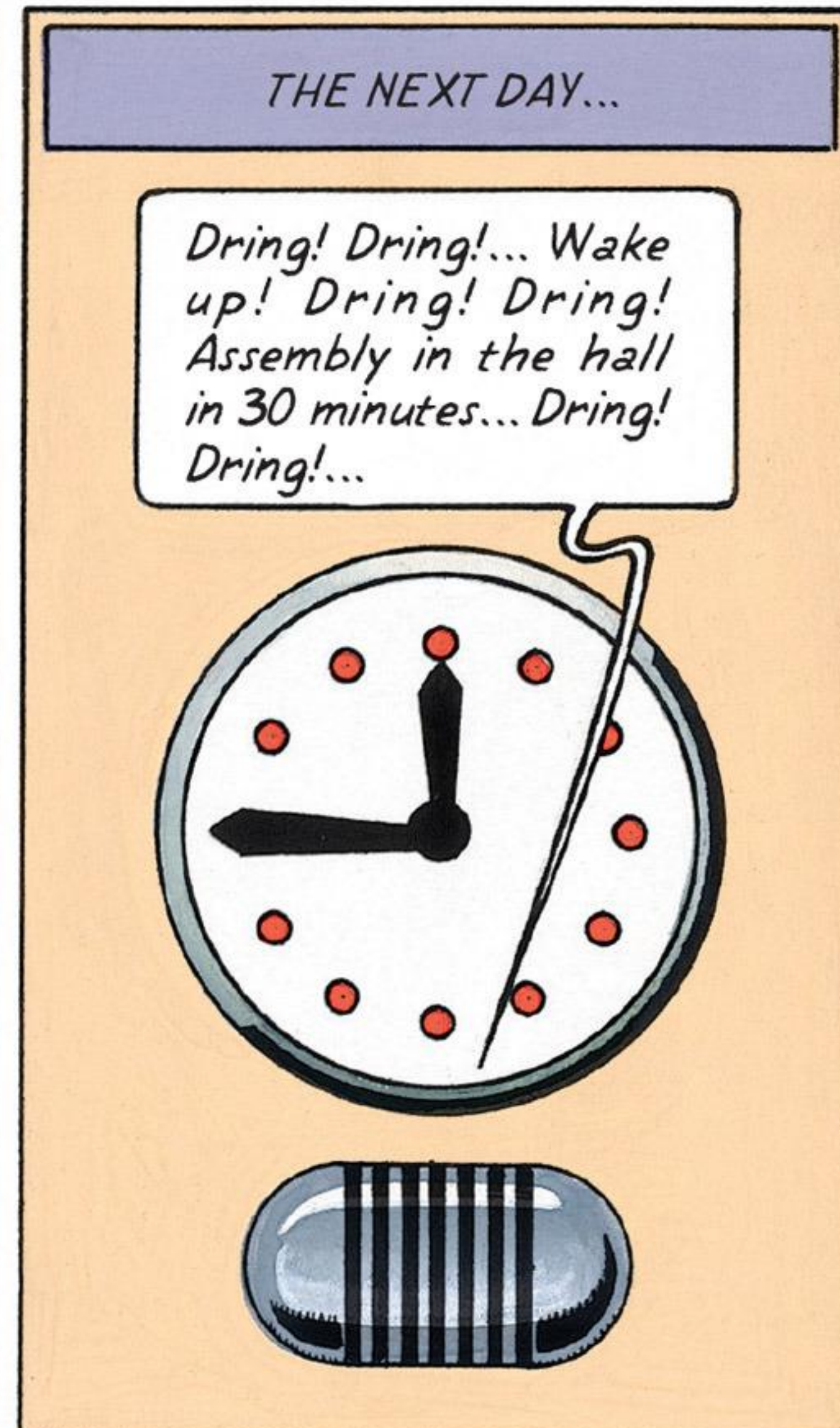
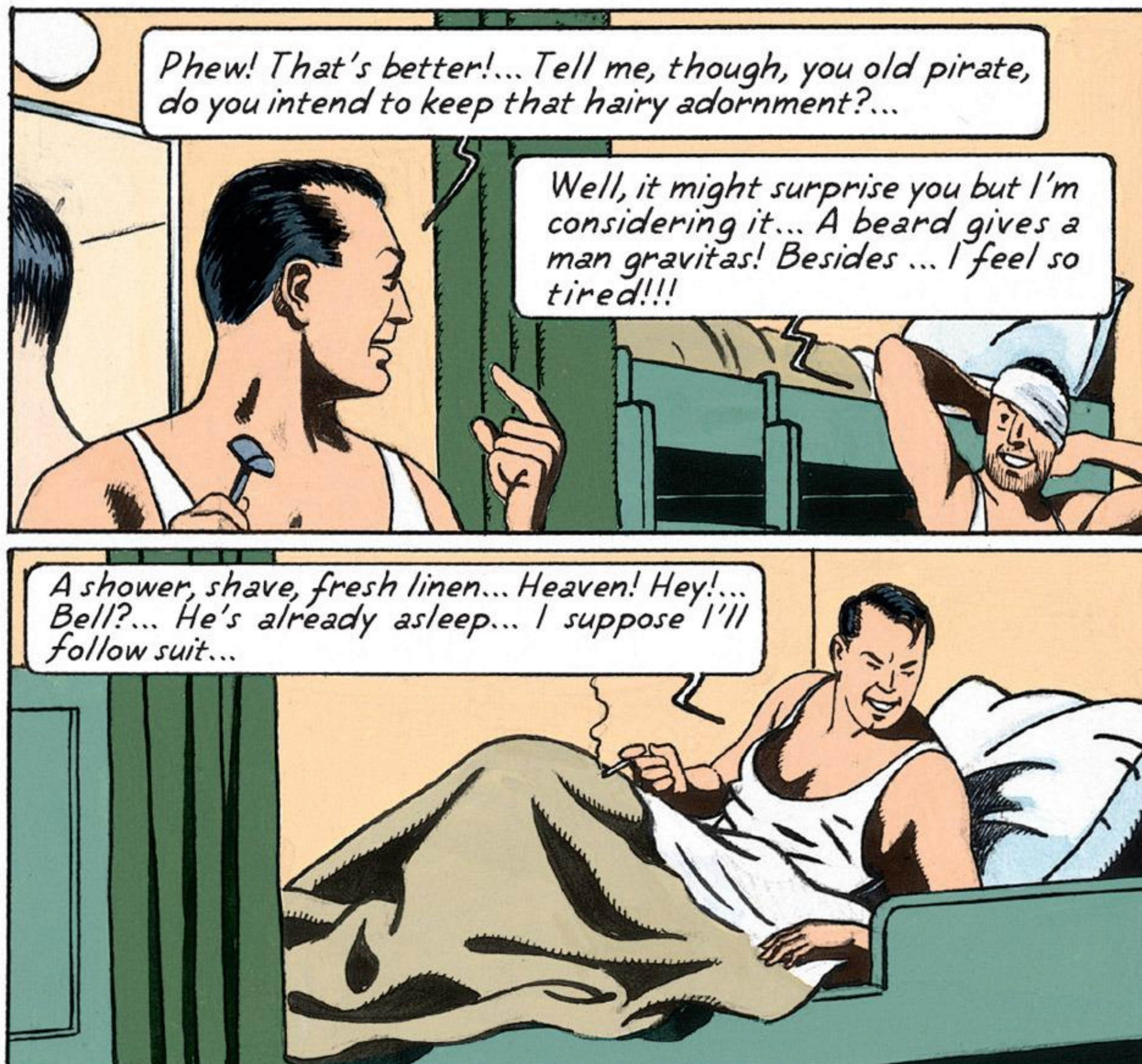
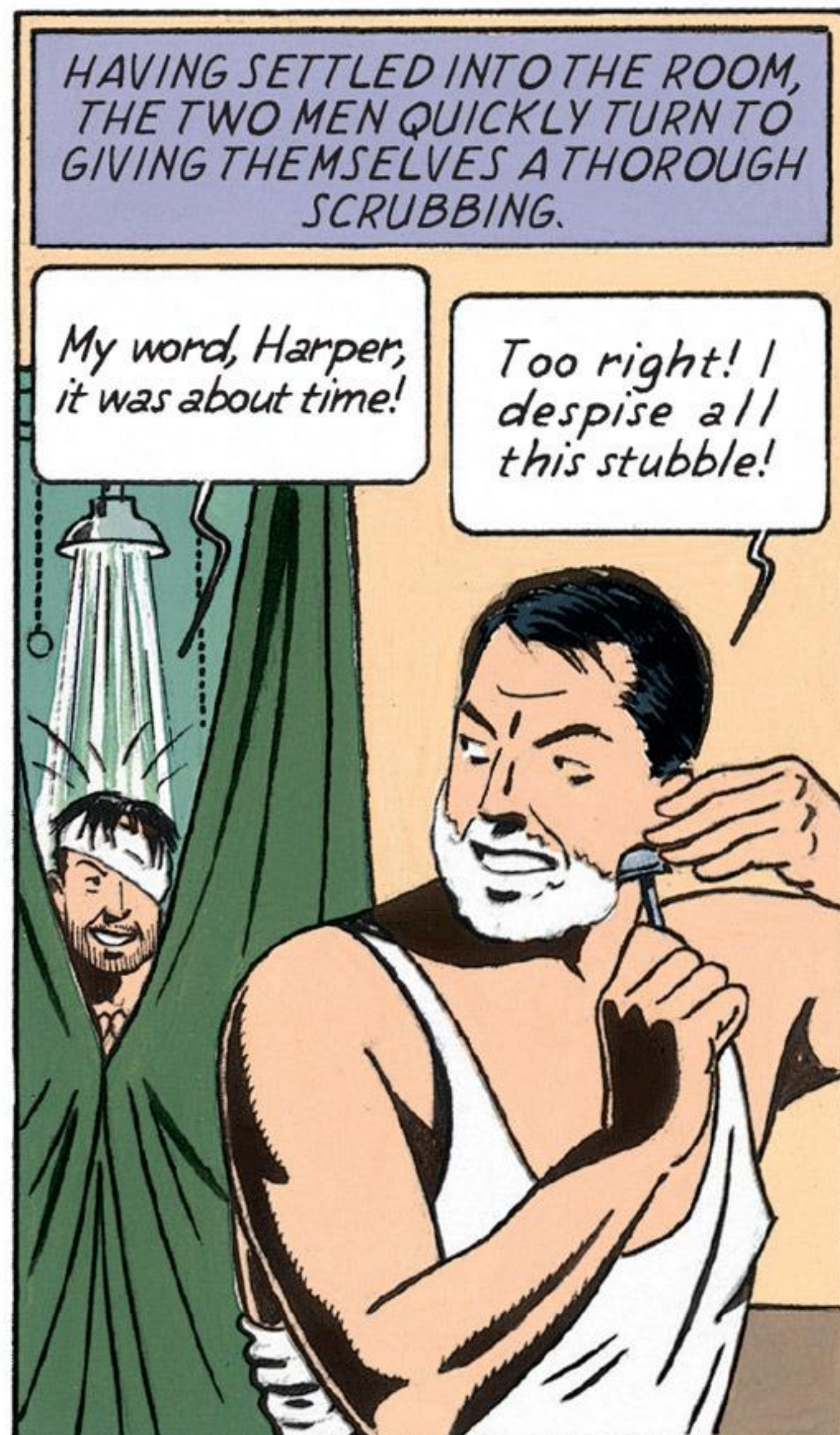
Yes, sir.

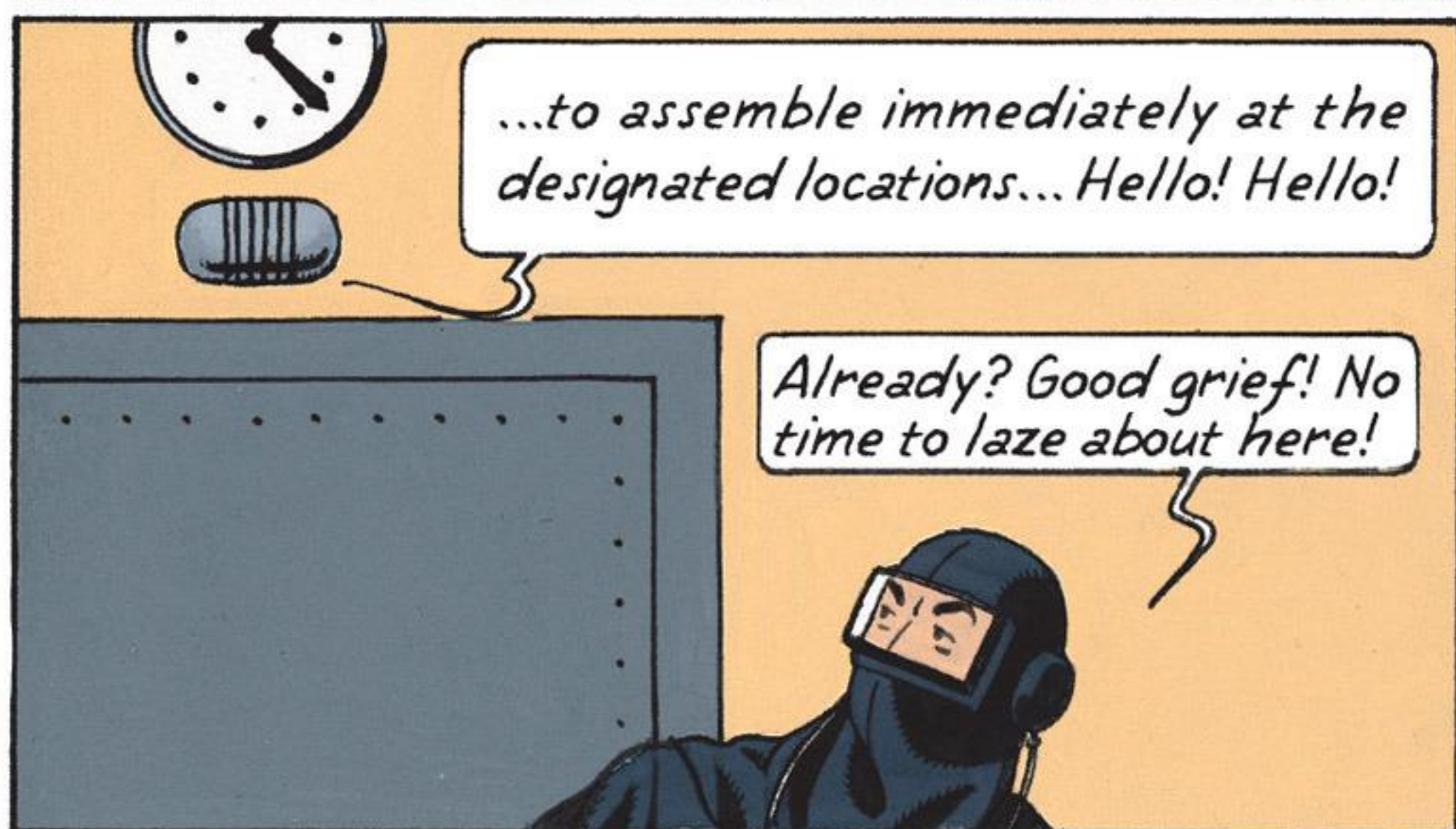
Goodnight, Harper!

See you tomorrow, Blake!

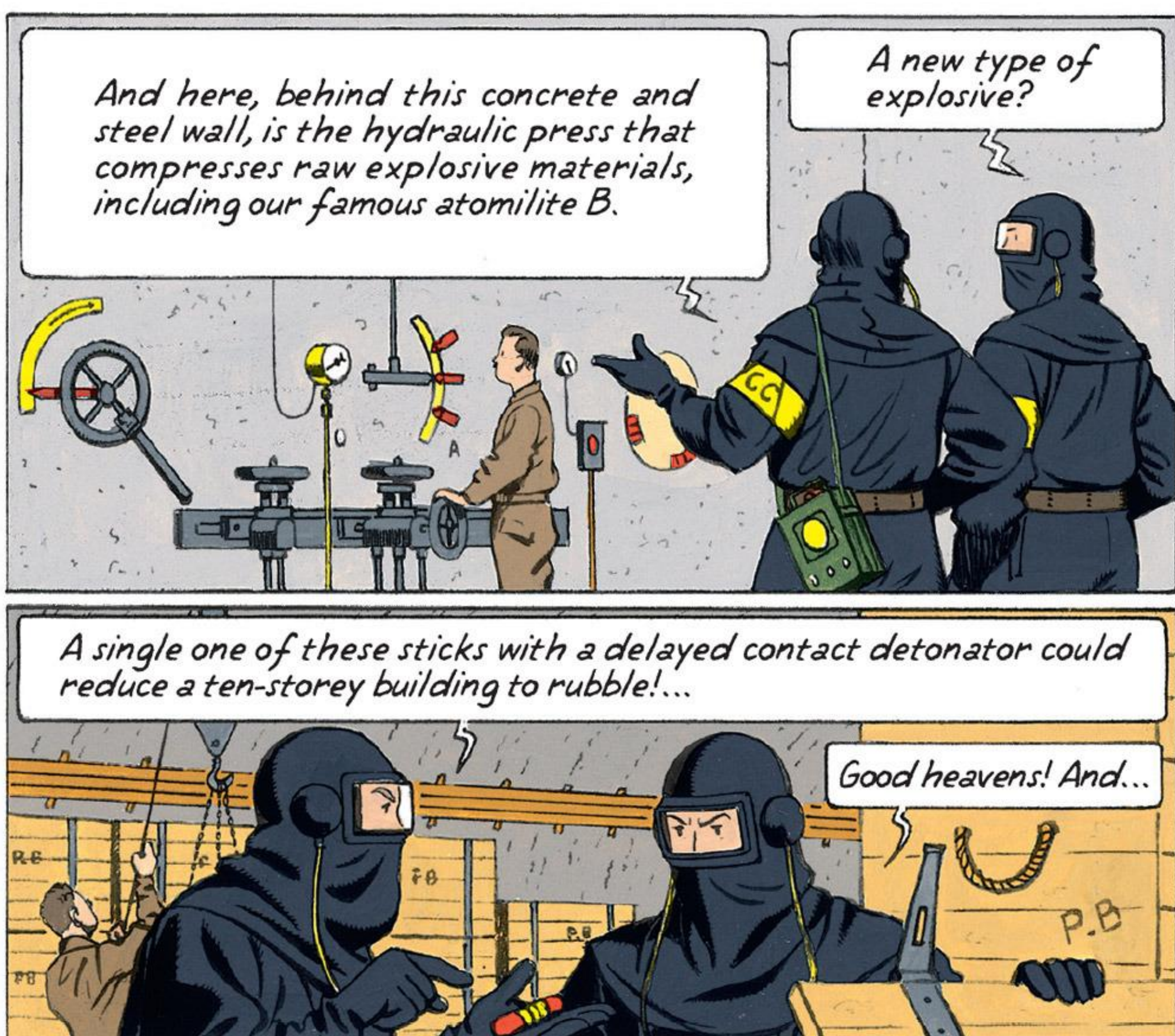
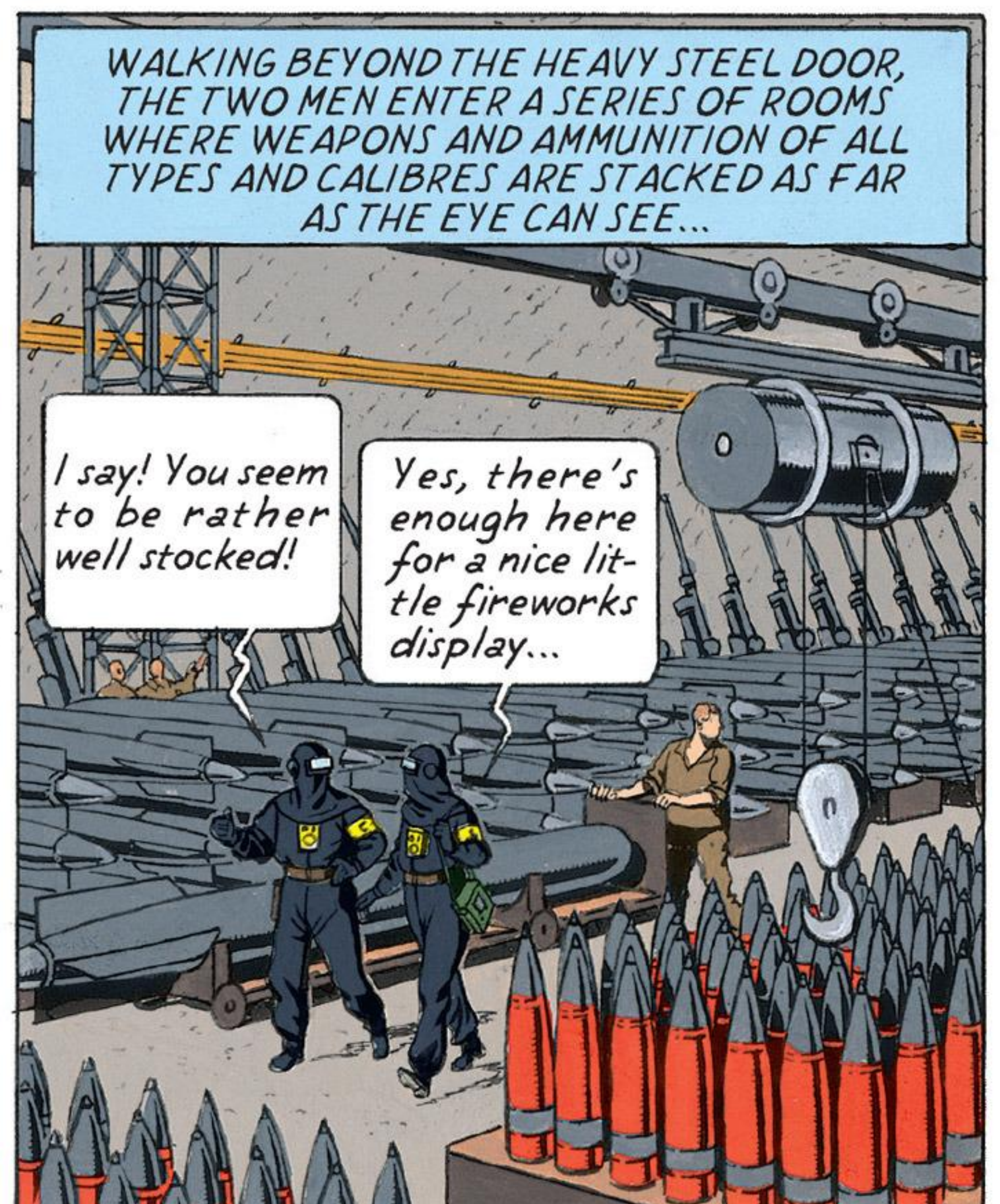
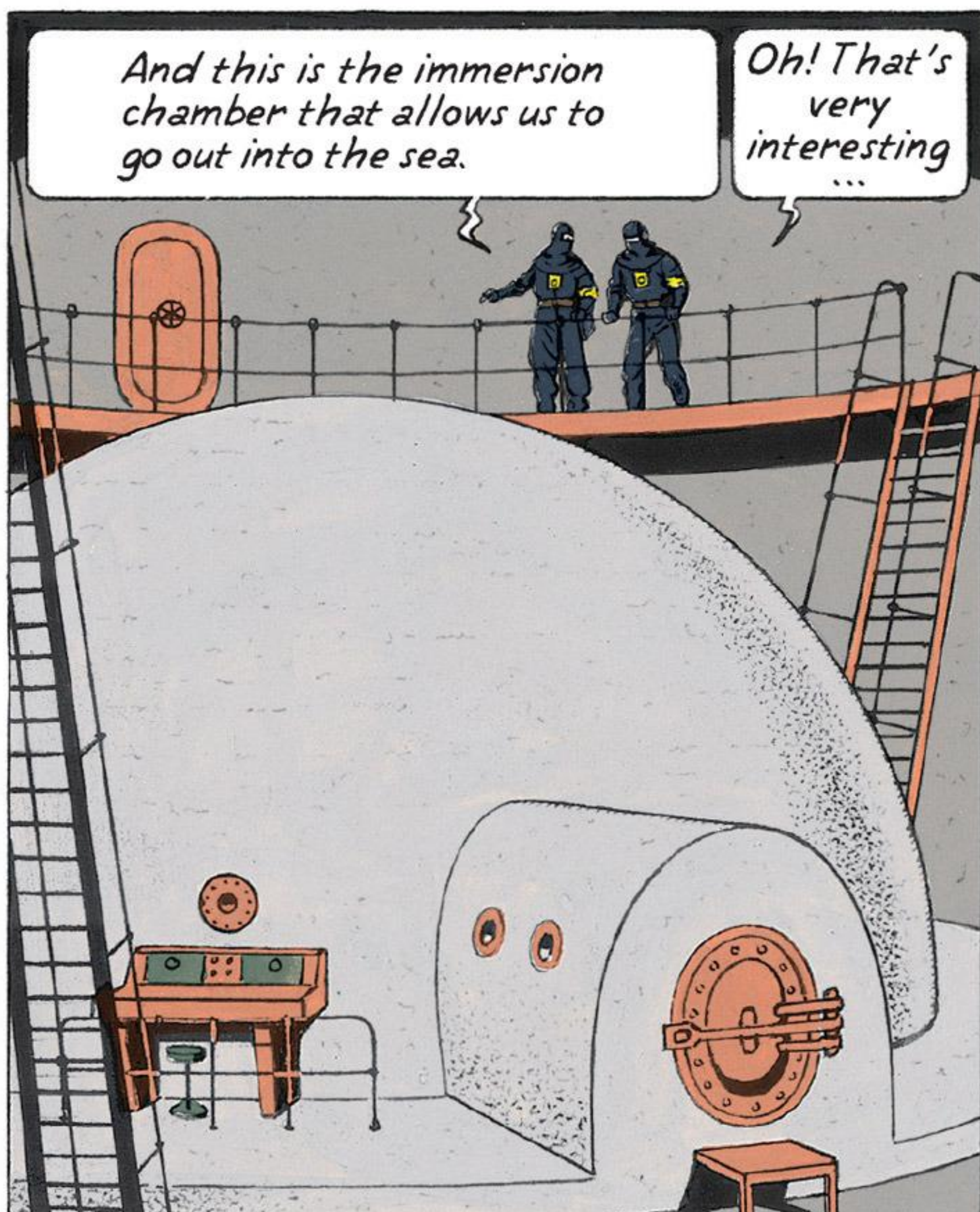
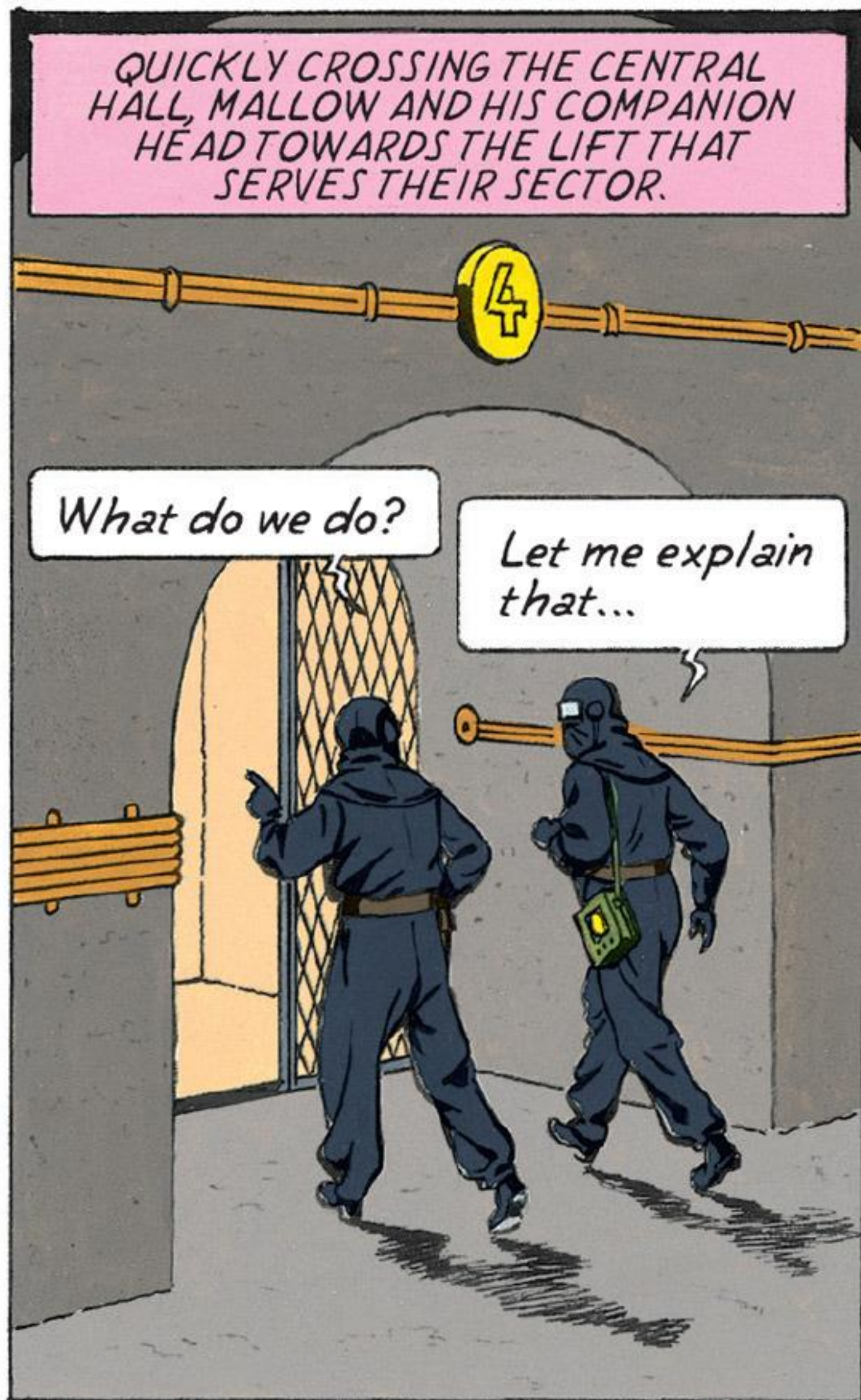
A LITTLE LATER, FED AND CARRYING NEW CLOTHES, THE MEN ARE TAKEN TO THE TECHNICIANS' SECTION.

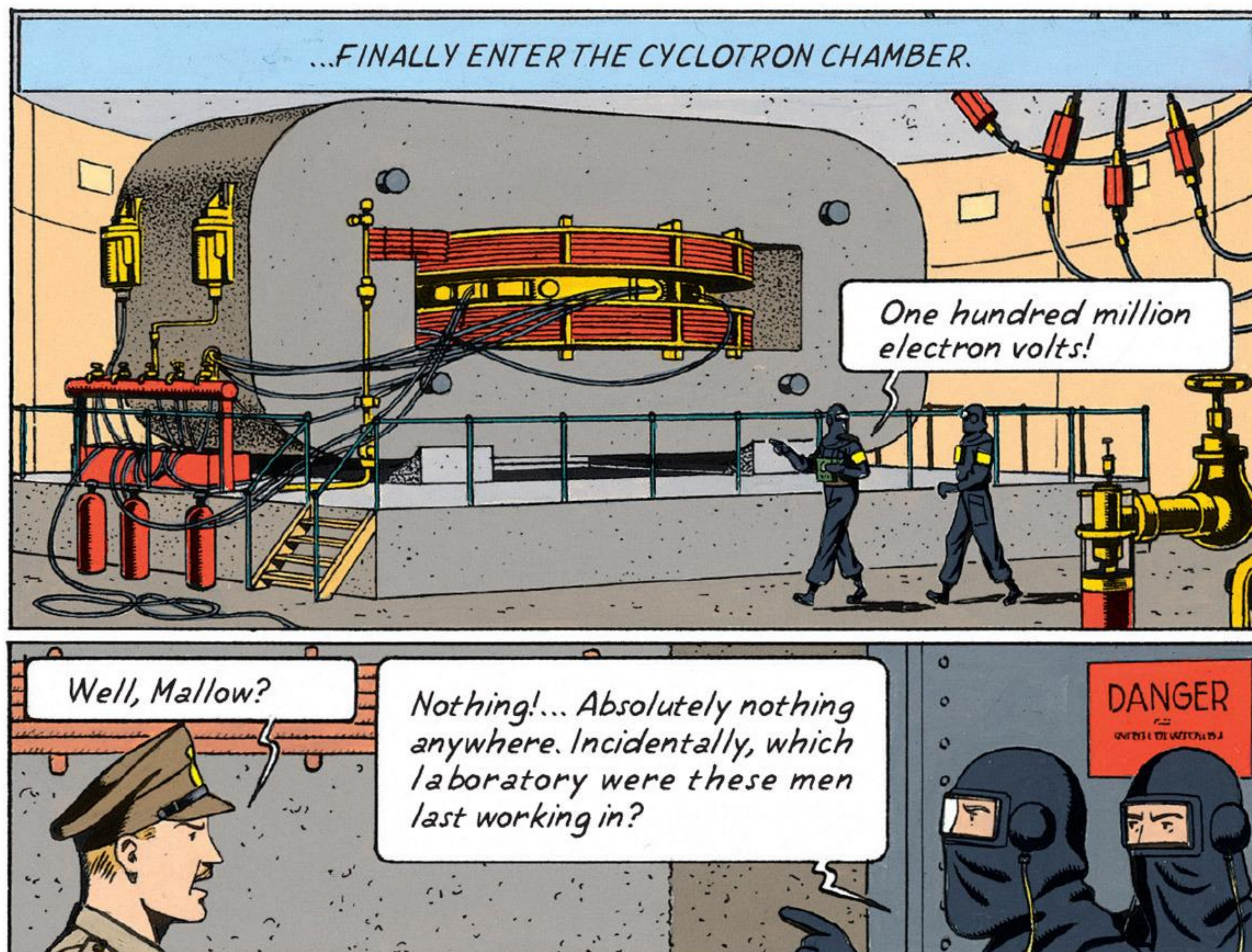
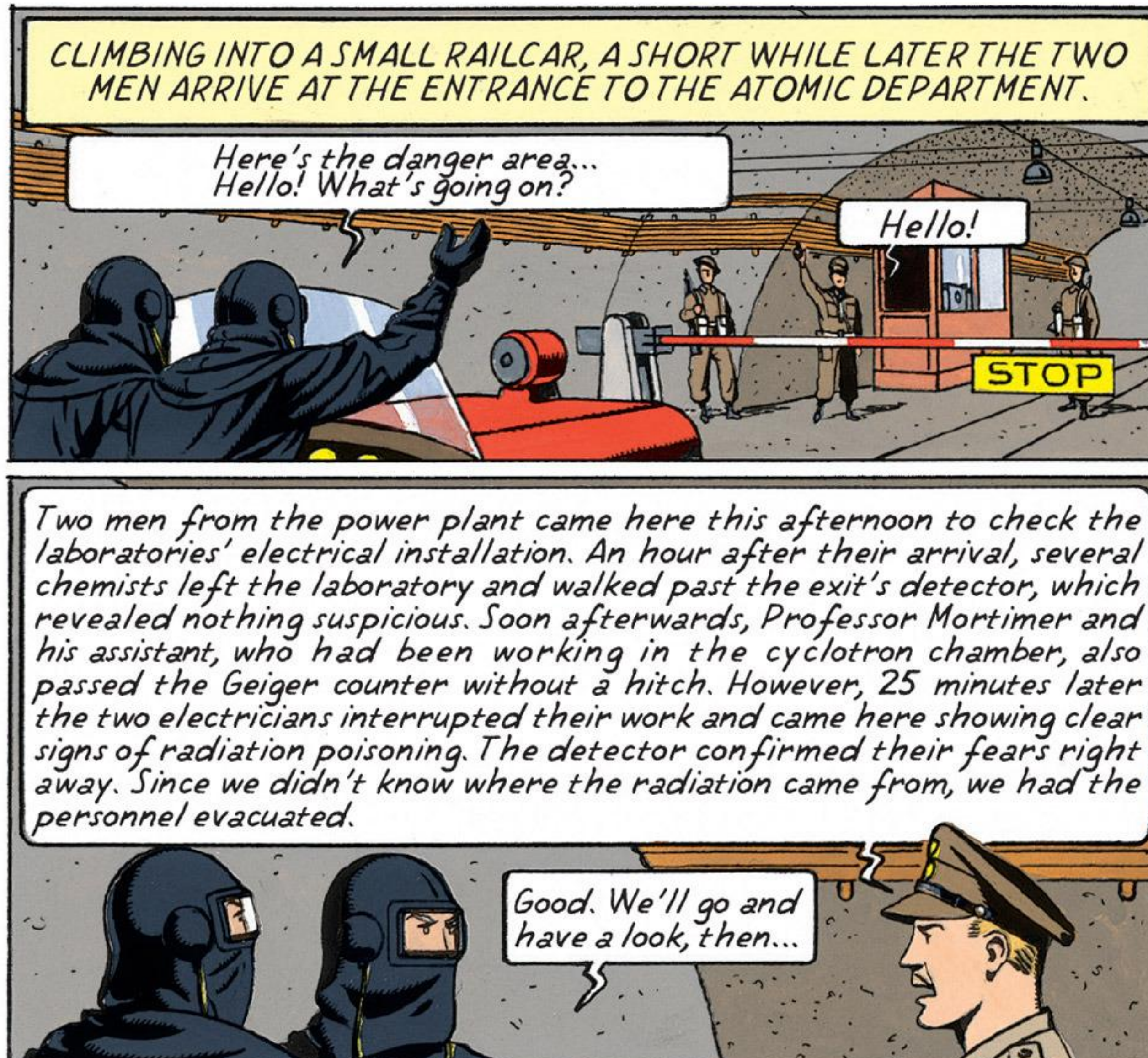
Your room, gentlemen.





*CONTROL CORPS





MALLOW APPROACHES A LAB COAT HANGING FROM A PEG AND EXAMINES IT CLOSELY BEFORE SUDDENLY PLUNGING HIS HAND INTO ONE OF THE POCKETS...

What on earth are you looking for?...

Ah!

This, dear fellow! Pliers turned radioactive! After repeated contact with radioactive material, these pliers are now also emitting extremely dangerous gamma rays... All the more dangerous since no one would think of being wary of the changing room!

Well, I'll be...! That's Stone's coat - the professor's assistant... He must have slipped the pliers into his pocket without thinking and forgotten all about it...

Small causes, great effects! But do step aside, for safety's sake.

SEVERAL MOMENTS LATER, THE TWO MEN RESUME THEIR INTERRUPTED PATROL AND LEAVE THE ATOMIC SECTOR. MALLOW MAKES HIS REPORT TO CAPTAIN MANDERTON.

...No sir, there's no danger... The items were safely stored inside the lead cabinet of the laboratory... Understood, Captain.

But Mallow, if there's a cyclotron here ... that means there's uranium as well?

Well reasoned, old fellow! In fact, you could say there's a whole mine of it! That's right: 200 feet below us there's an exceptionally rich uranium deposit. Foreseeing a possible breakdown in our lines of communication, the government decided to extract and refine the ore on site. It therefore ordered the construction of a military base over the mine that was capable of being self-sufficient for months. Unfortunately, the Empire's attack surprised us before everything was completed... Anyway, we're stopping here.

LEAVING THE RAILCAR, THE TWO C.C. START DOWN A LONG CORRIDOR...

Tell me, these openings I see everywhere... What are they for?

Air shafts... They come down from the ventilation room and connect several levels, and are themselves linked by other transverse air ducts. They contain steel ladders for inspections, and each patrol has a key opening the access grates... See...

Let me give you some light...

Hmm! Not a good place to be afraid of heights!...

Truly, Mallow, there's little chance of getting bored with you! But what's this?

The nerve centre of the base. Come in!

INSIDE A GREAT VAULTED HALL, SIX ENORMOUS TURBINE GENERATORS ARE HUMMING...

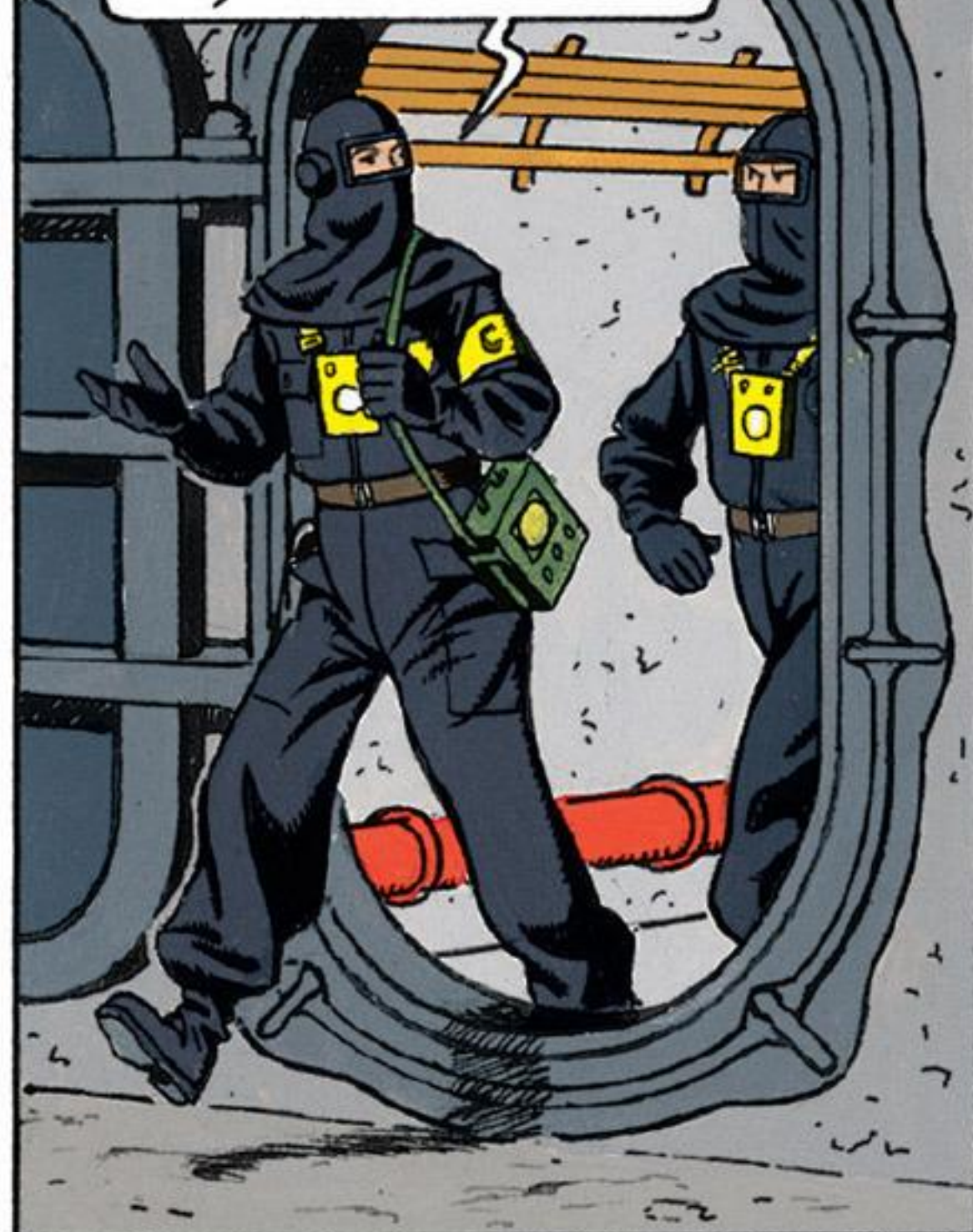
This is the plant that provides power for every sector of the base.

Fantastic! Although that doesn't tell me where the energy is coming from...

Patience... You'll soon see...

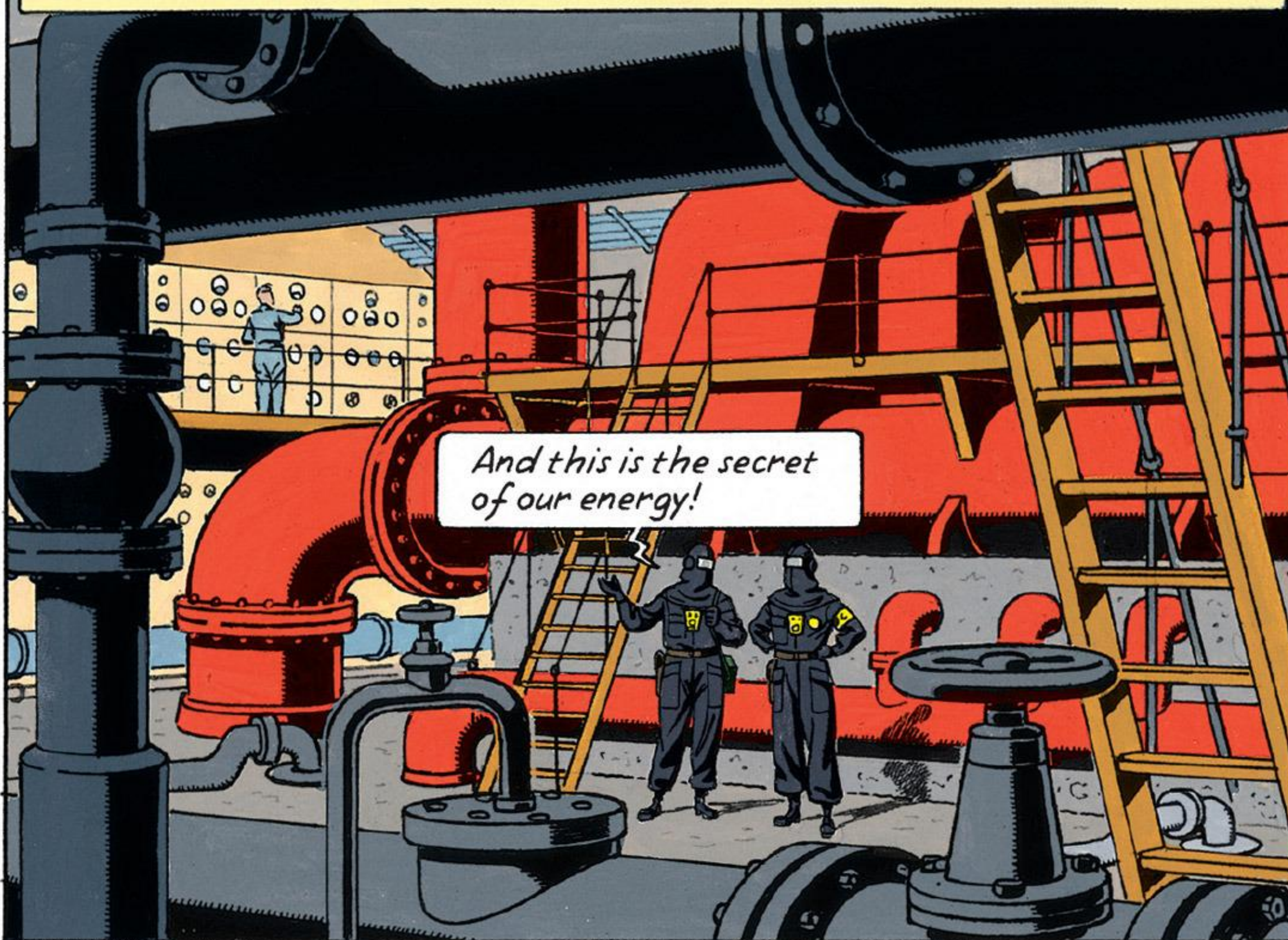
MALLOW LEADS HIS COMPANION ALONG A NARROW CORRIDOR DIVIDED BY MASSIVE AIRTIGHT HATCHES...

We're reaching the very heart of the base...



PAST ONE FINAL HATCH, THE TWO MEN STOP IN THE MIDDLE OF AN INEXTRICABLE TANGLE OF PIPES, DUCTS AND VALVES: THE PUMPS CHAMBER...

And this is the secret of our energy!



Through these huge pipes an unlimited, inexhaustible source of energy comes to us... The ocean's energy!

Goodness!



This process uses the temperature difference between surface waters and deep waters in tropical seas. It's very simple: the warm water from the surface comes to evaporate in the vacuum of a boiling chamber, and the resulting vapour condenses inside a condensation chamber when it comes into contact with cold water extracted from the deep. The vapour current created between the boiling chamber and the condensation chamber powers a large turbine, thereby converting thermal energy into mechanical energy, and finally into electrical energy by simply connecting the turbine to an alternator. And voilà!

Astounding!



This is really the vital point of the base, so now you understand the extraordinary security measures imposed on the personnel... One simple accident here or in the plant and we're paralysed...

Indeed I understand... No power, no Swordfish!...



Especially as time is running out! The Imperials suspect something, and it's now a real race between us...

Speaking of which, how close is that Swordfish to completion?



That?... You mean those Sw... Hey, you've dropped something...

I... Oh!?



A STICK OF ATOMILITE, ITS DETONATOR ALREADY SCREWED ON, HAS JUST FALLEN OUT OF HARPER'S POCKET.



Eh?!... What is this?... Atomilite!... But that means... You!... Hello! Hel...

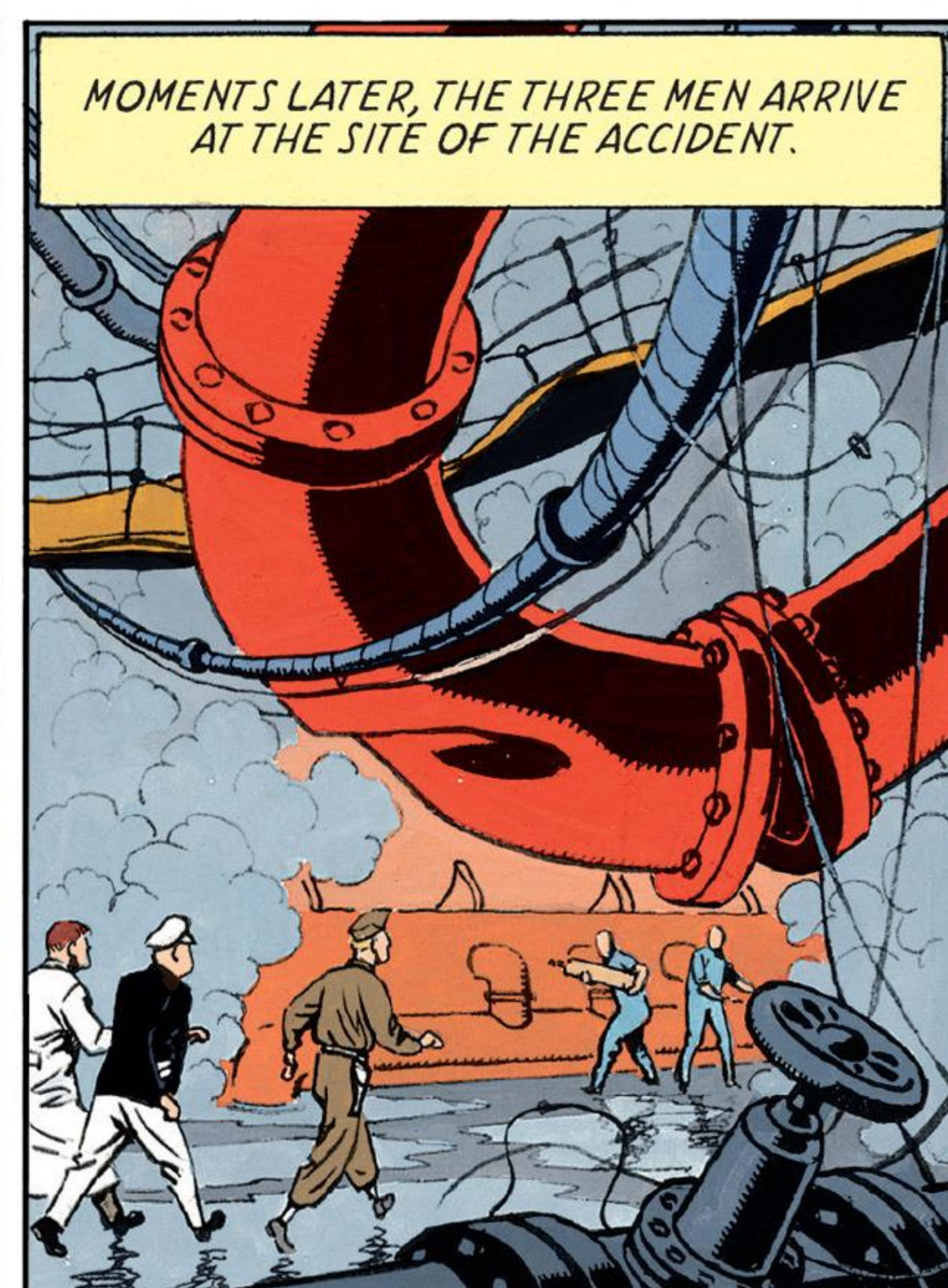
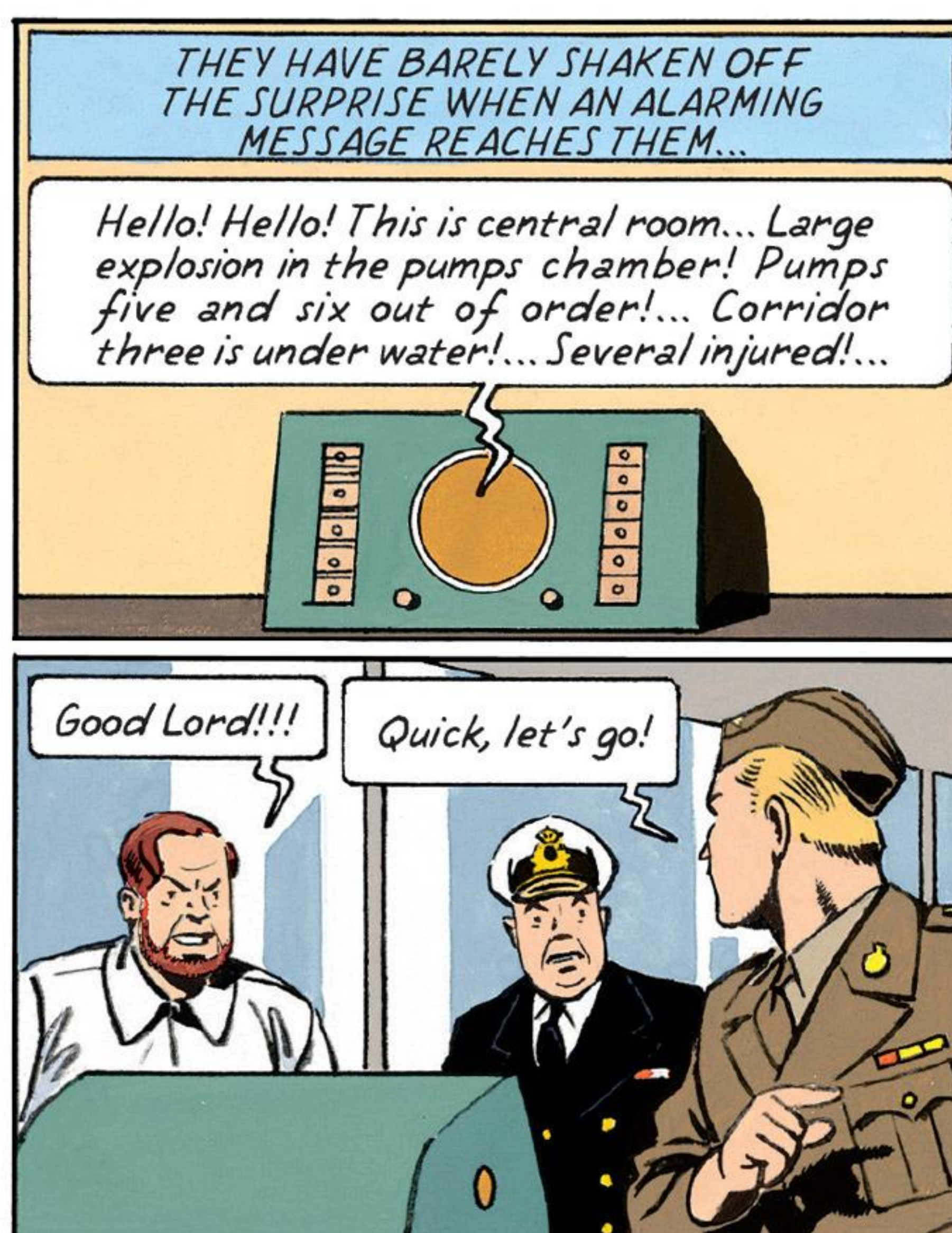
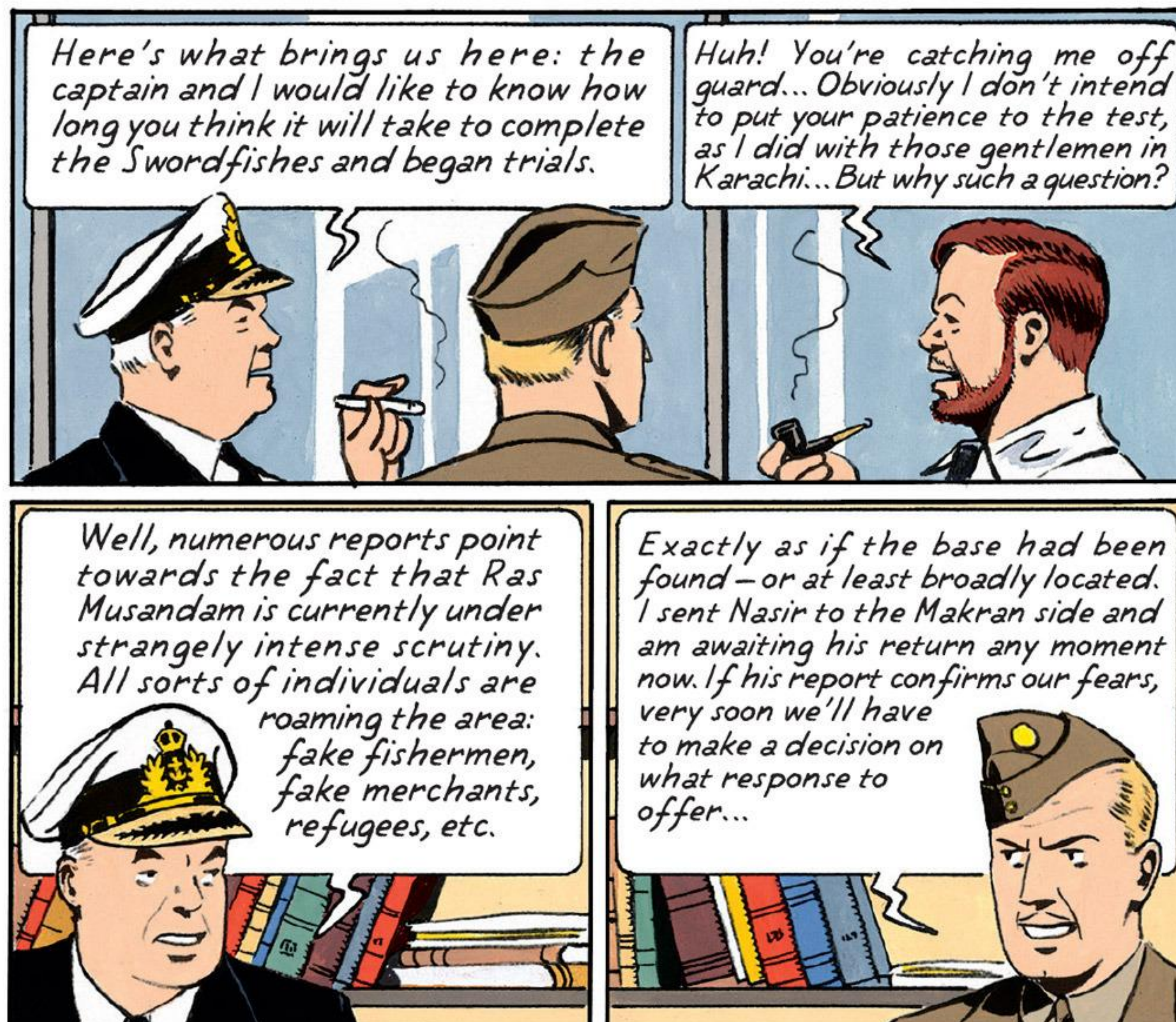


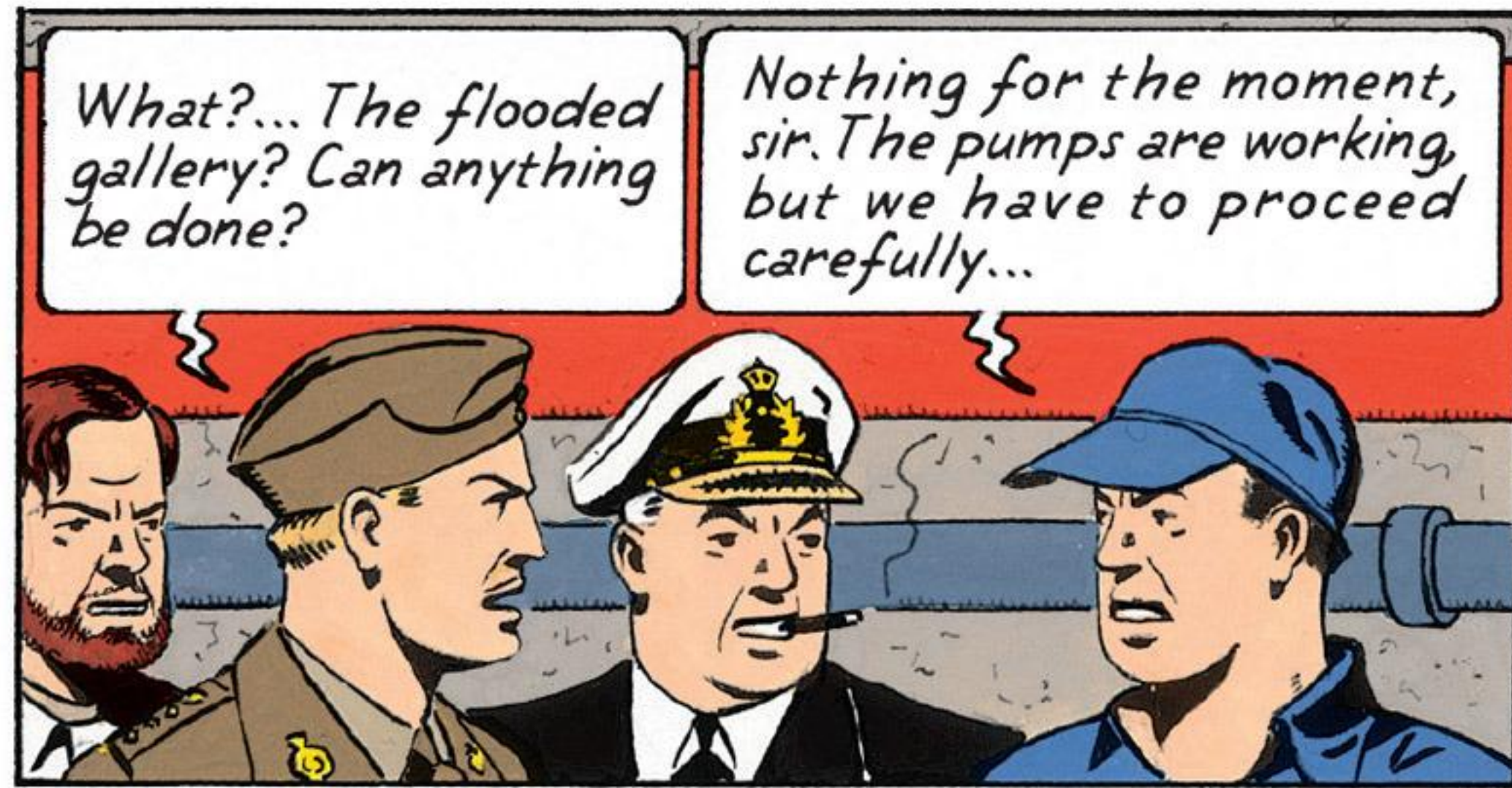
Don't be a fool, Mallow!



Hello! Hello! This is central room... Who's calling?... Must have been a mistake... I could have sworn...

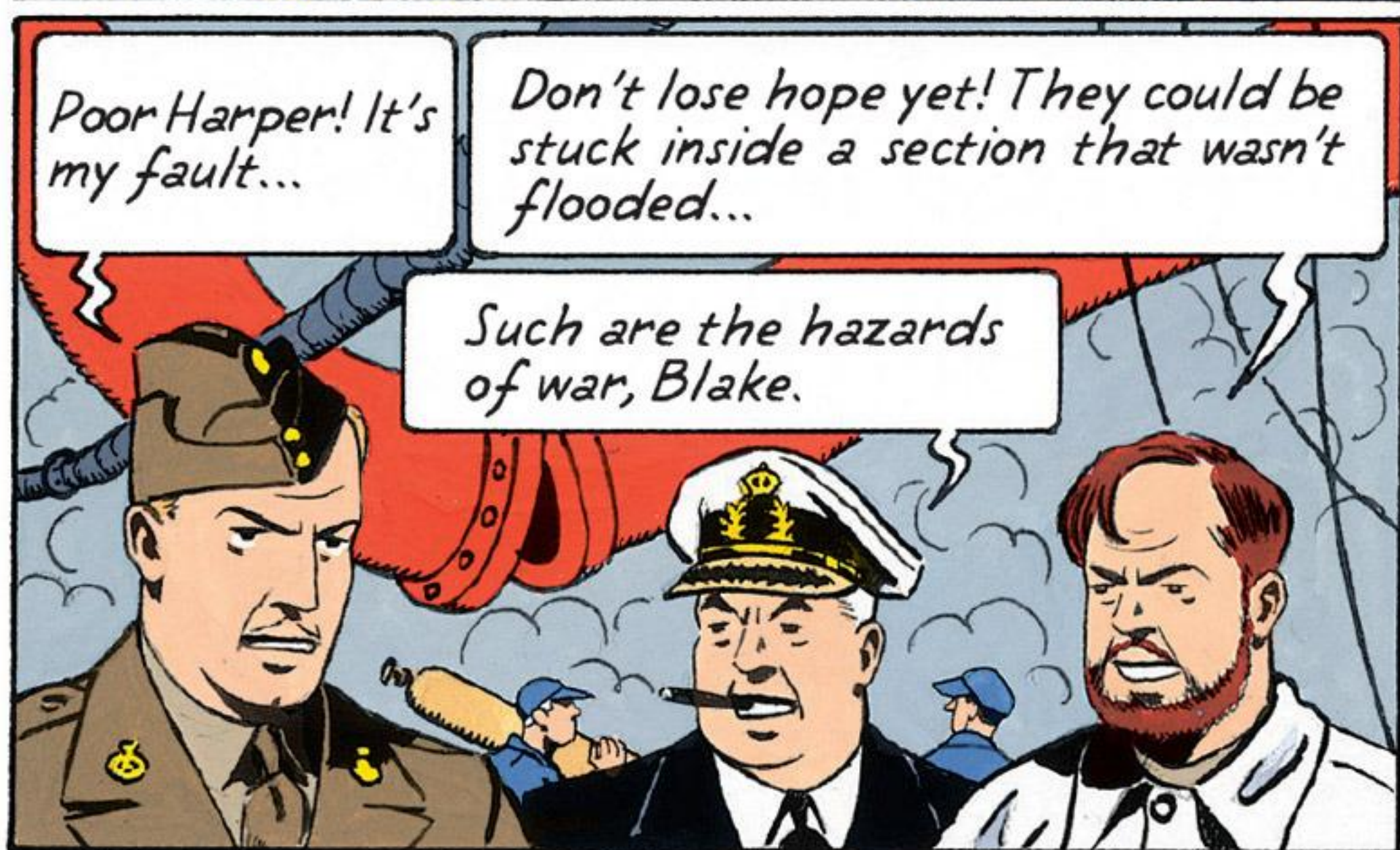






What?... The flooded gallery? Can anything be done?

Nothing for the moment, sir. The pumps are working, but we have to proceed carefully...



Poor Harper! It's my fault...

Don't lose hope yet! They could be stuck inside a section that wasn't flooded...

Such are the hazards of war, Blake.

HAVING GIVEN THE NECESSARY ORDERS, SIR WILLIAM TAKES HIS LEAVE FROM BLAKE AND MORTIMER.

If there's any news about Harper I'll let you know immediately. As for you, notify me as soon as Nasir comes back.

Very well, sir.

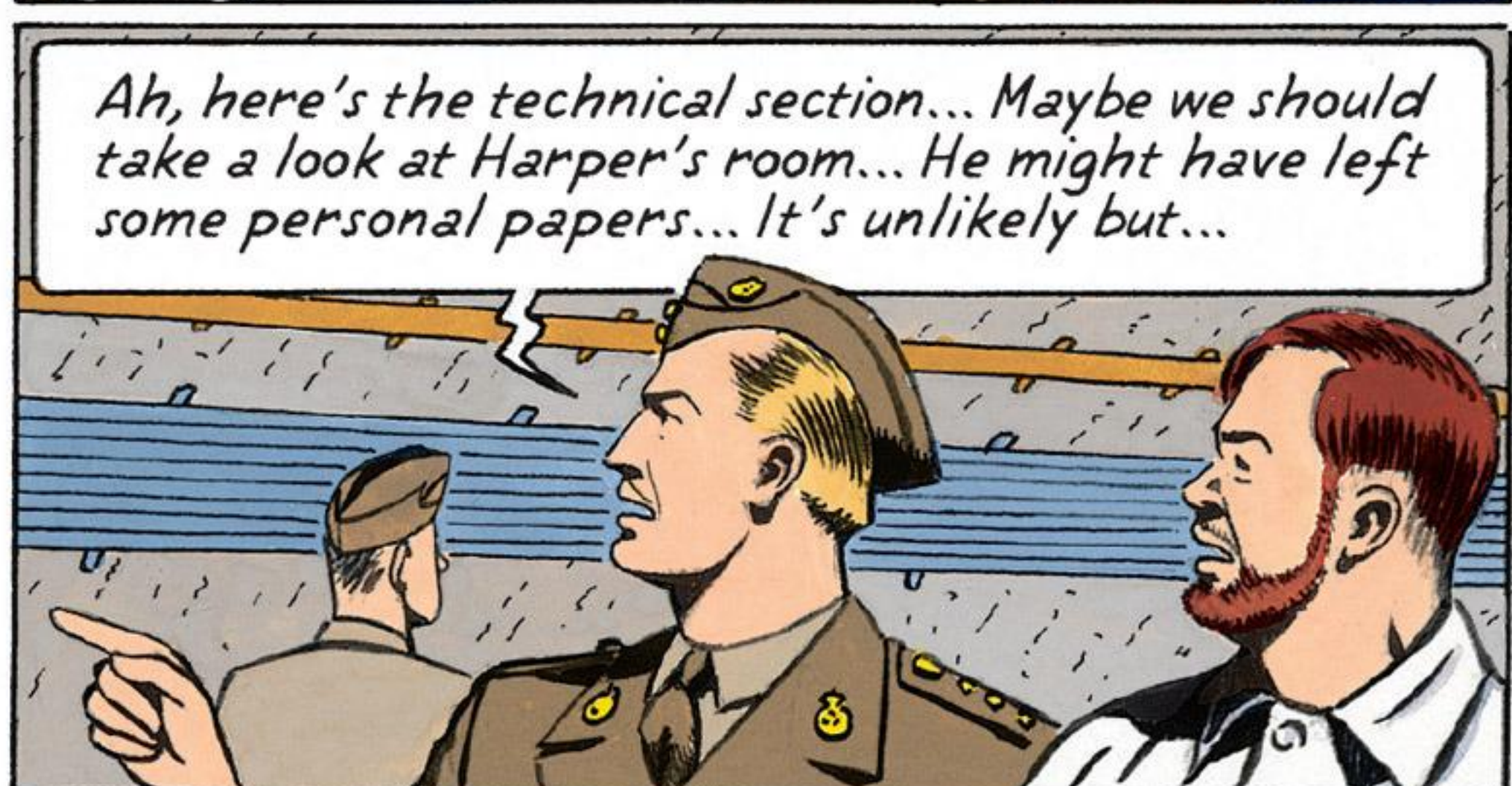


Come on, old boy, snap out of it! And let's figure out how to deal with this new setback...

Yes, you're right Mortimer. It's just that I can't stop thinking about that poor chap... What a stupid accident...



Ah, here's the technical section... Maybe we should take a look at Harper's room... He might have left some personal papers... It's unlikely but...



BLAKE WALKS UP TO THE DOOR AND KNOCKS...



Bell's in for a surprise.

HEARING NO ANSWER, HE OPENS THE DOOR AND ENTERS...



Forgive my intrusion, Bell, but...

Our man is a heavy sleeper, it seems...

SURPRISED, HE APPROACHES THE BED AND, SEIZED BY SUDDEN WORRY...

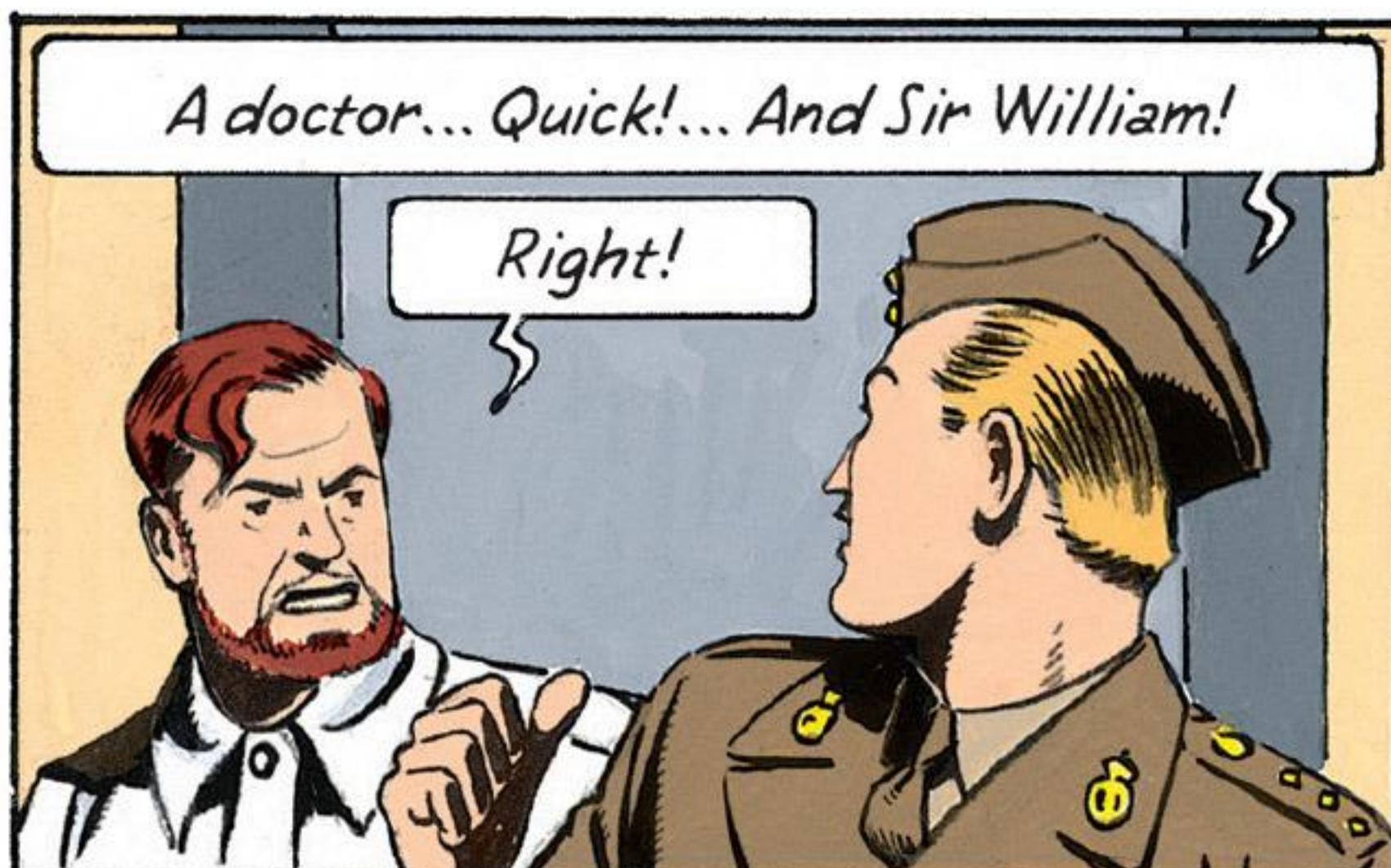


Hey! Bell! Bell!... What on earth...? He...

...HE THROWS BACK THE COVERS. HARPER IS LYING THERE, UNCONSCIOUS, BELL'S BANDAGE AROUND HIS HEAD...



Good heavens!... But this is Harper!!!



A doctor... Quick!... And Sir William!

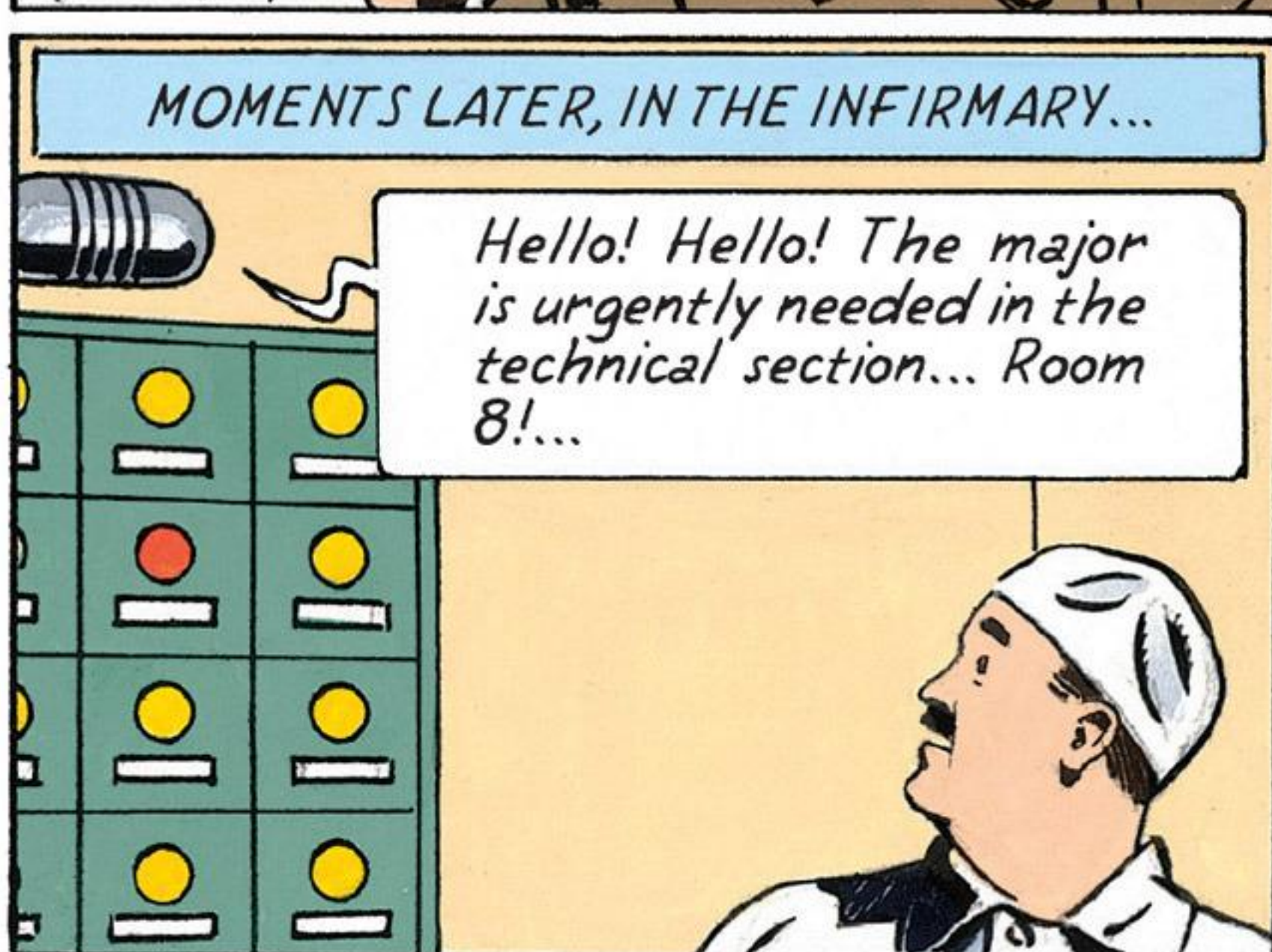
Right!

AS THEY WAIT FOR THE DOCTOR TO ARRIVE, BLAKE AND MORTIMER CONDUCT A QUICK EXAMINATION OF THE ROOM...

Yes, this is how it must have happened: Bell, a spy for the Imperials, sneaks into the prisoners' convoy, makes his way inside the base and, pretending to be indisposed, avoids the control committee. However, he knows he won't be able to do so for long. So, when Harper comes back with his C.C. uniform, Bell immediately sees its potential and decides to take his comrade's place. He hits Harper from behind, places him on the bed, wraps his head with his own bandage and heads to the C.R. Oh, if only we knew the face that was hiding behind that mysterious bandage and that rough beard!



Speaking of beard, someone here shaved in a hurry... Look: the soap dried on the brush and the razor wasn't cleaned... Moreover, the mess...



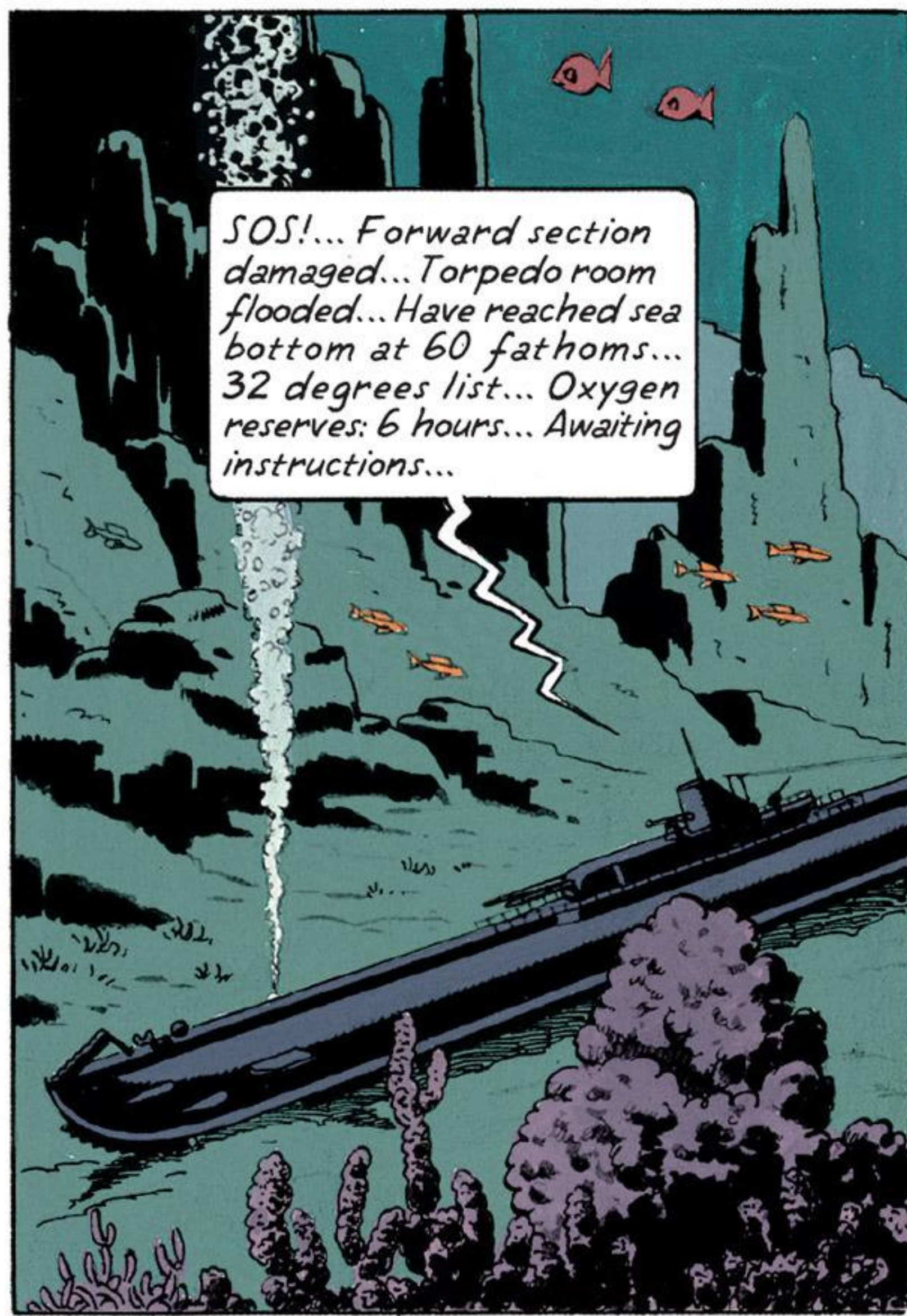
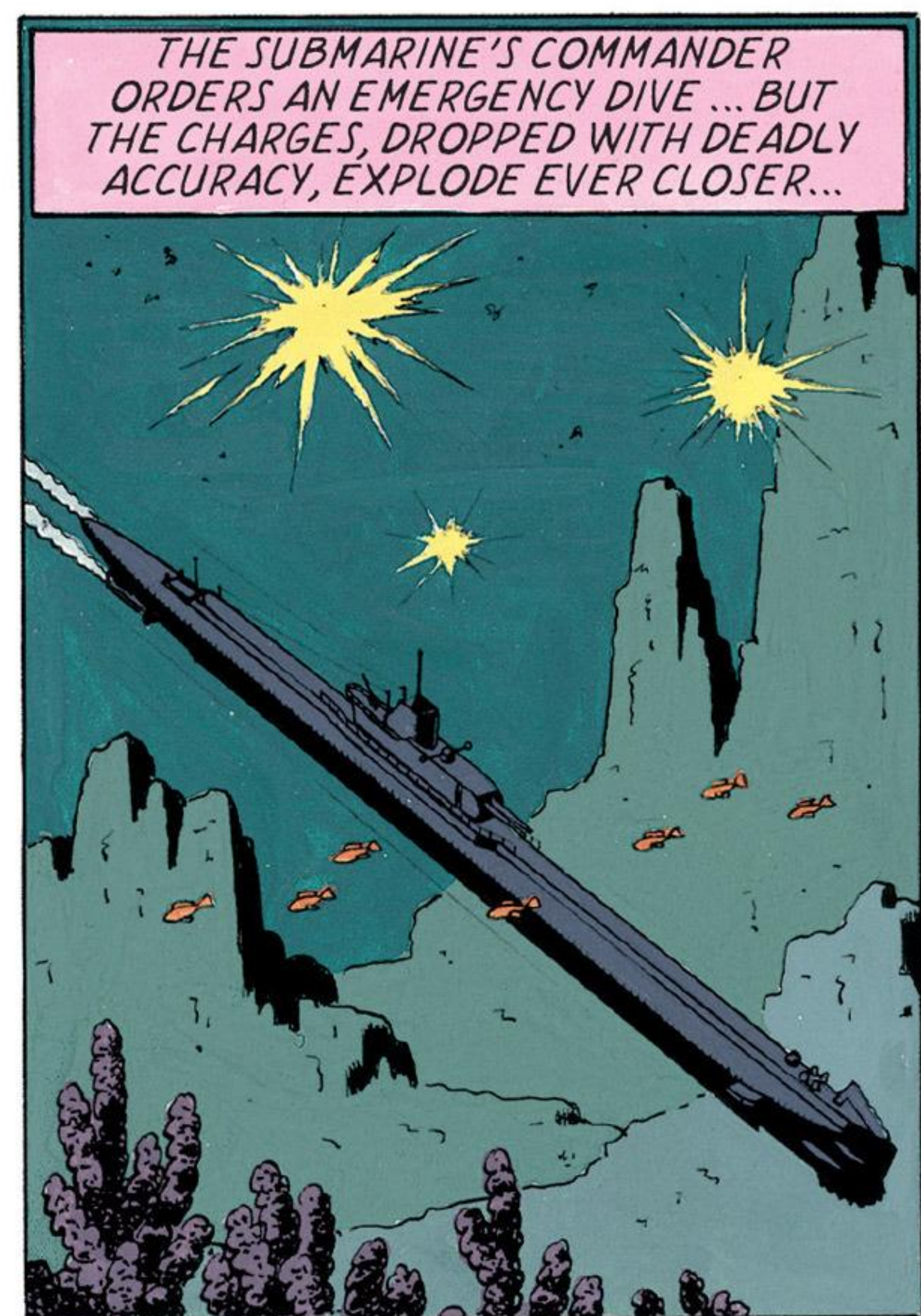
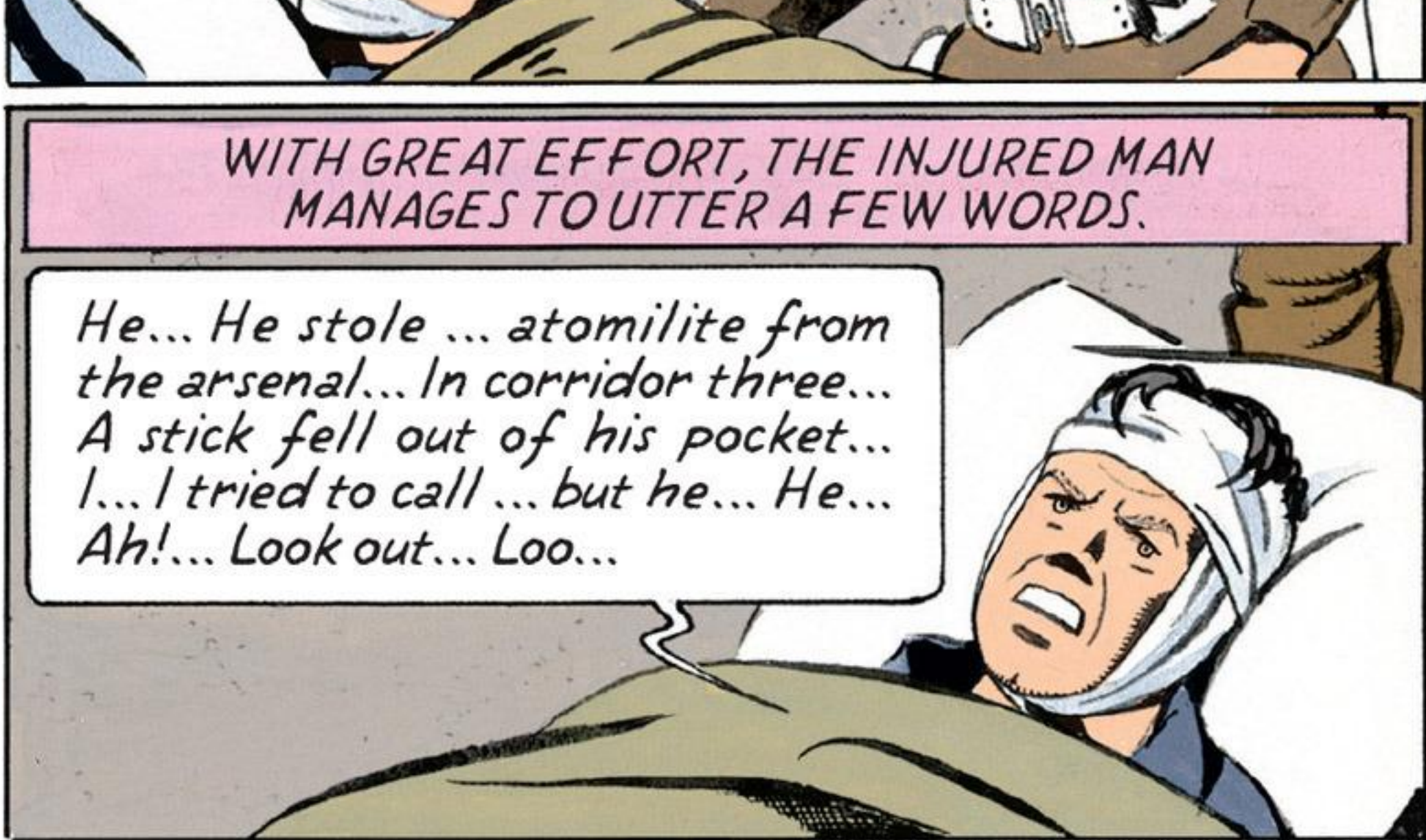
MOMENTS LATER, IN THE INFIRMARY...

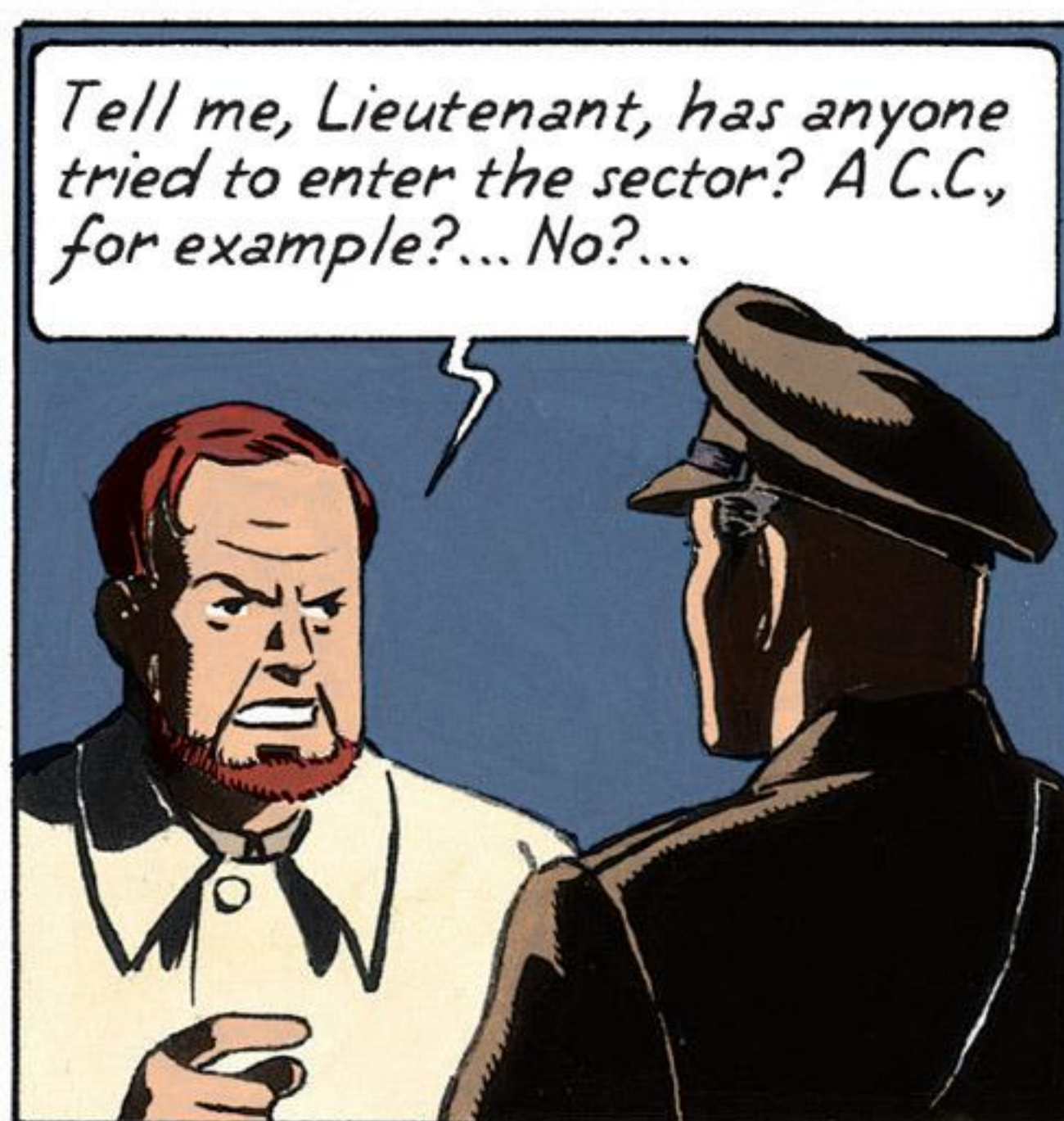
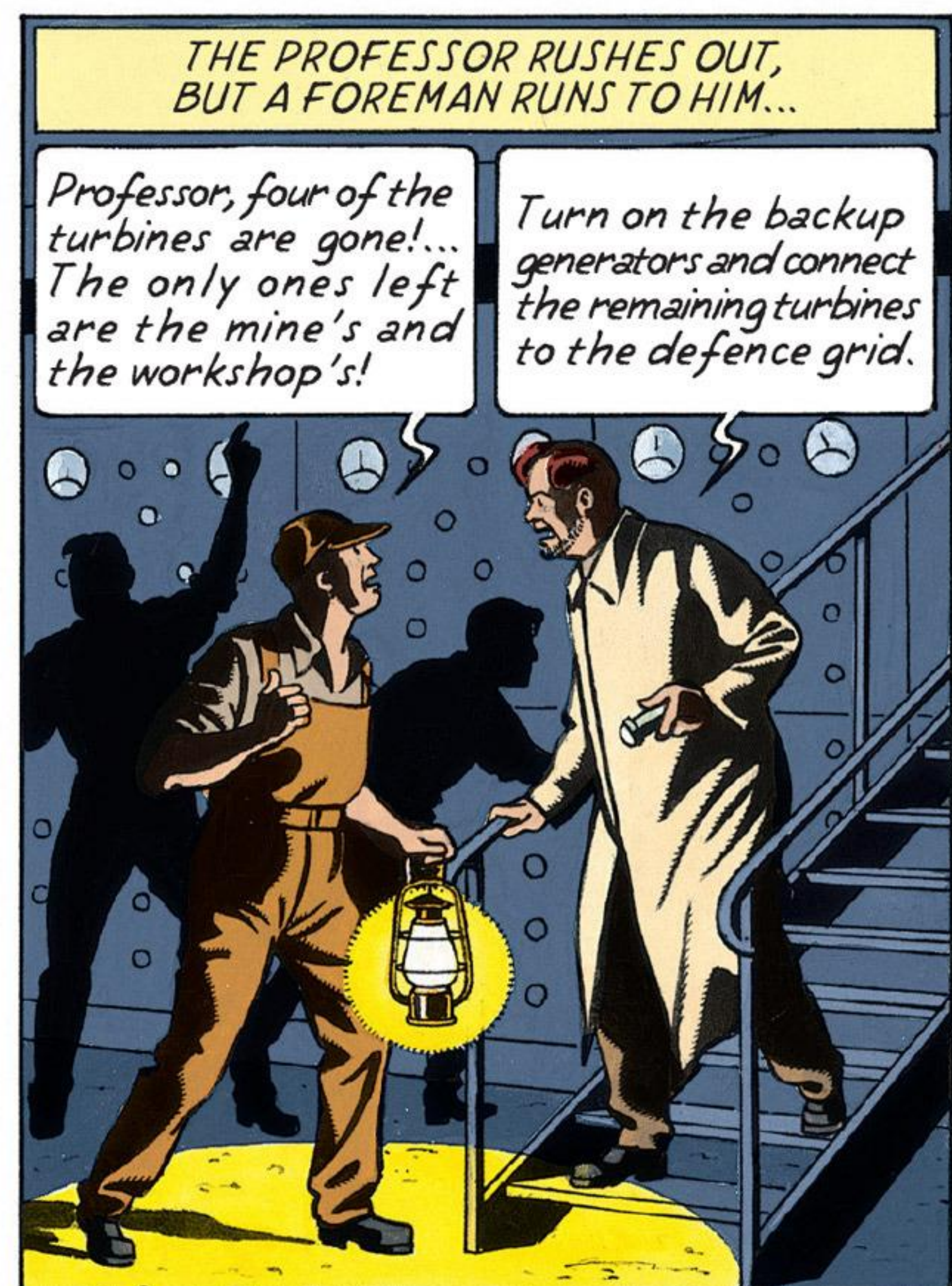
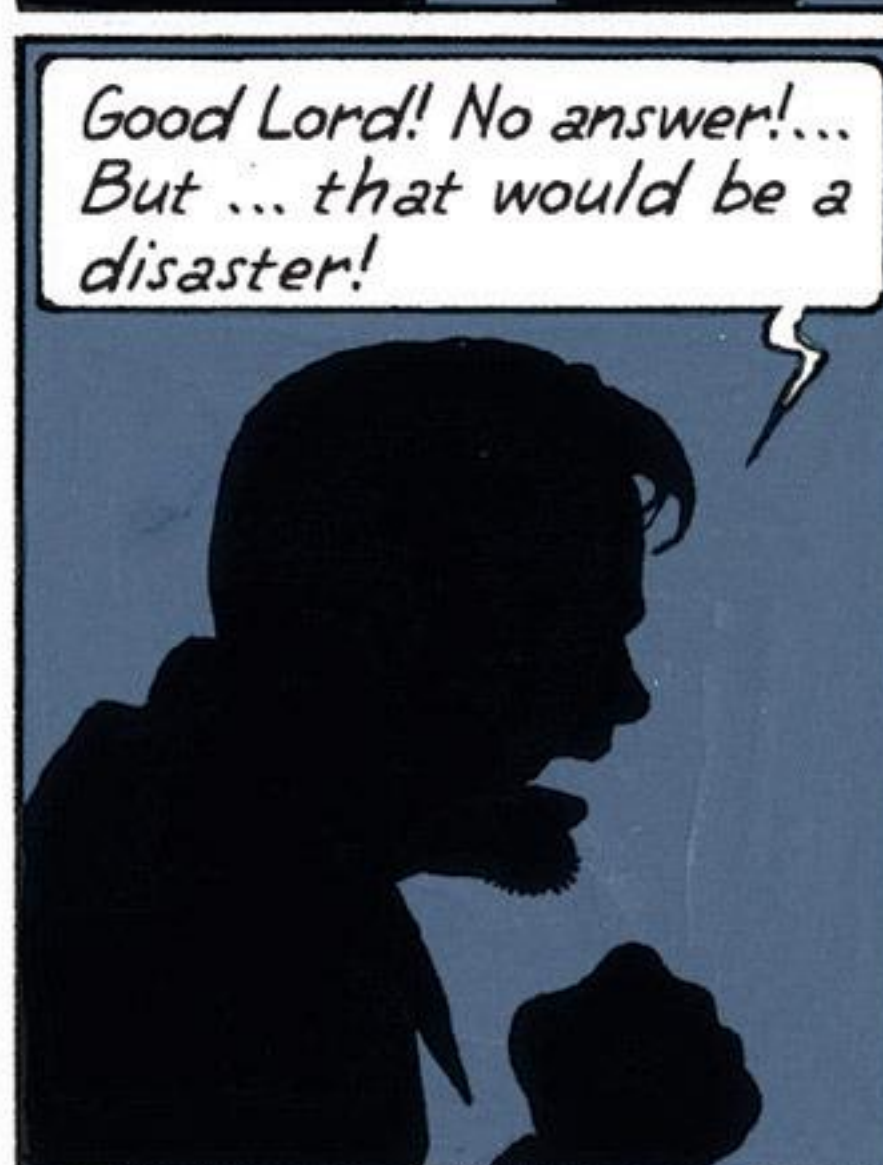
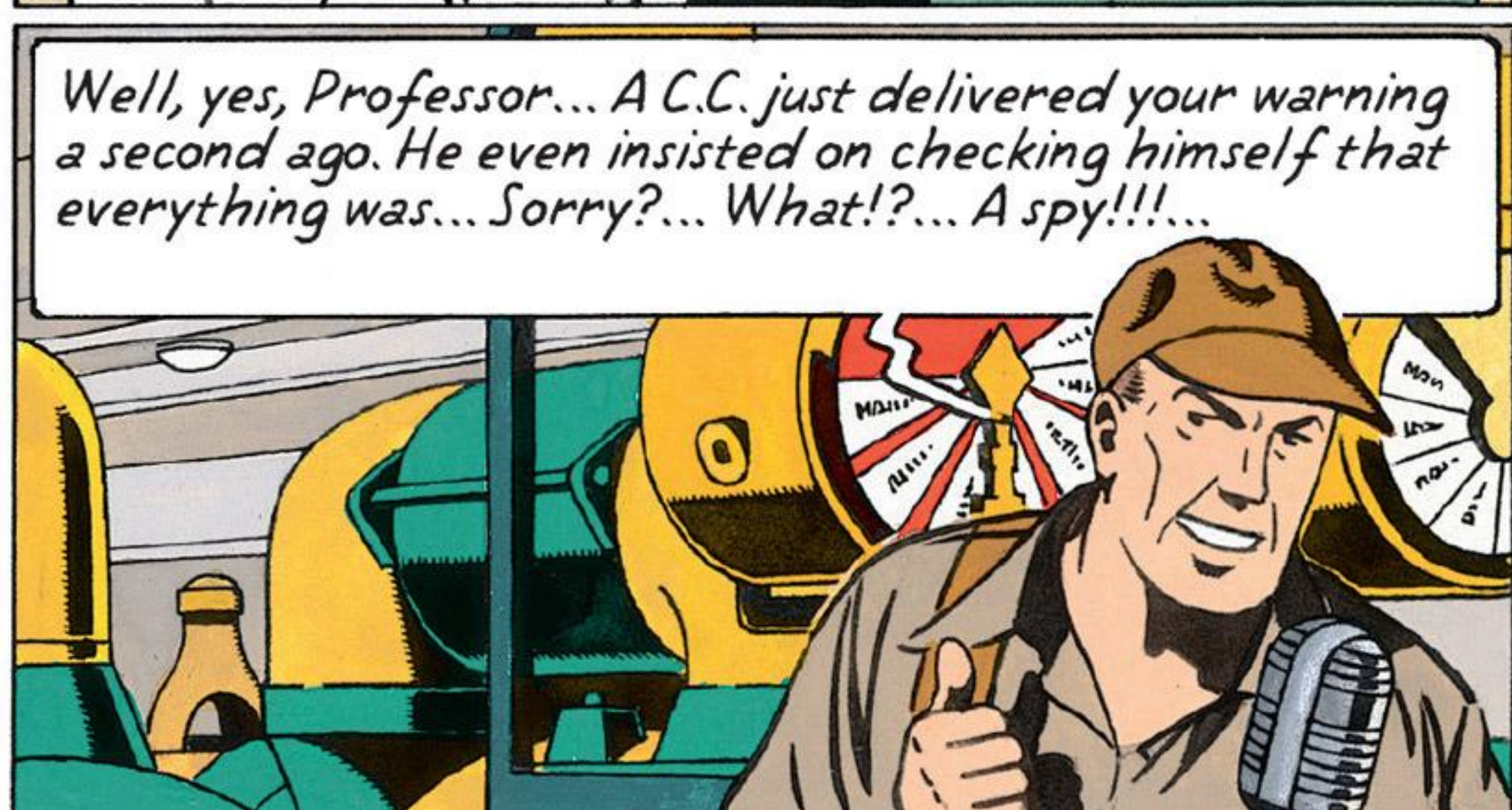
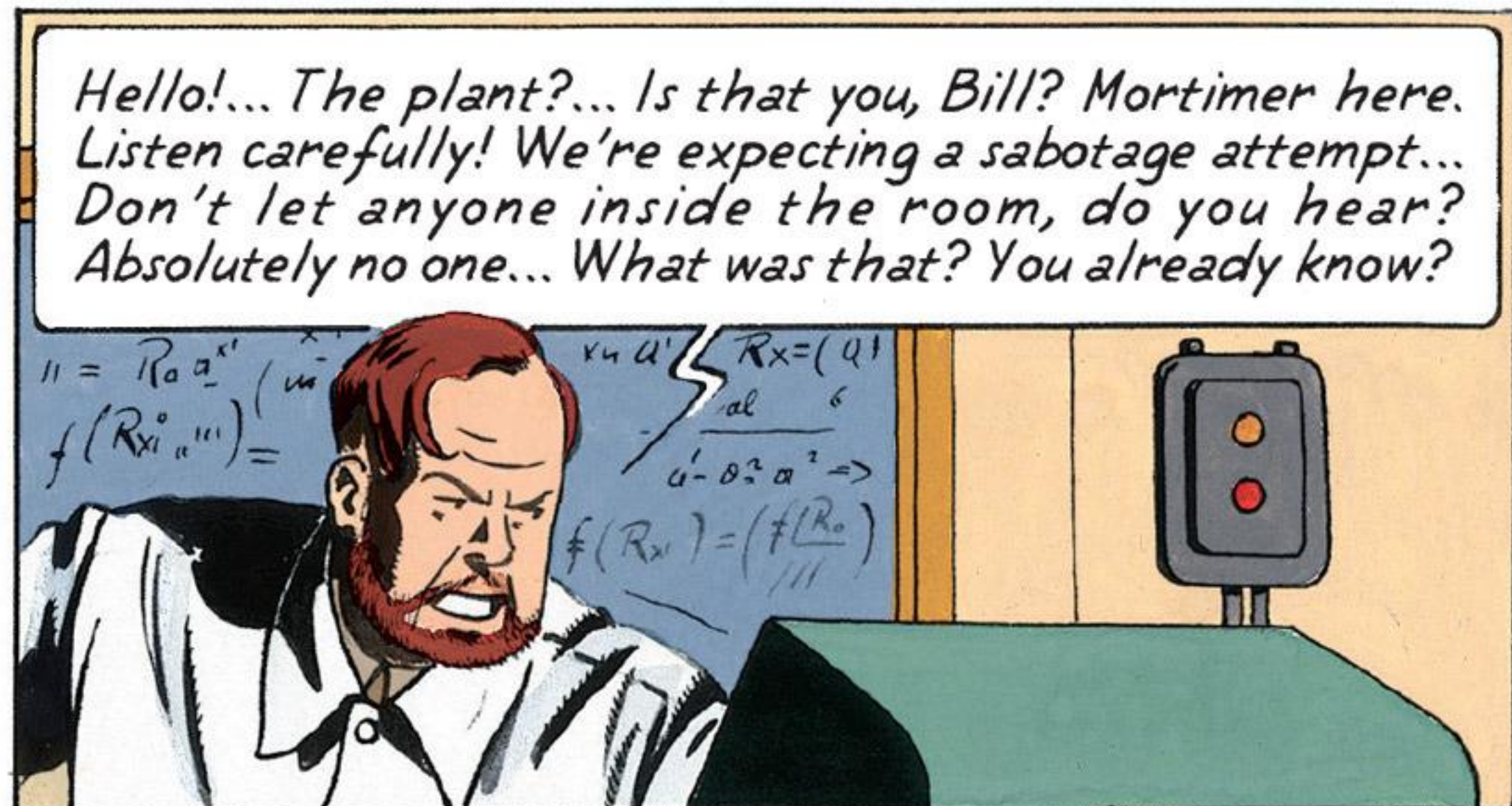
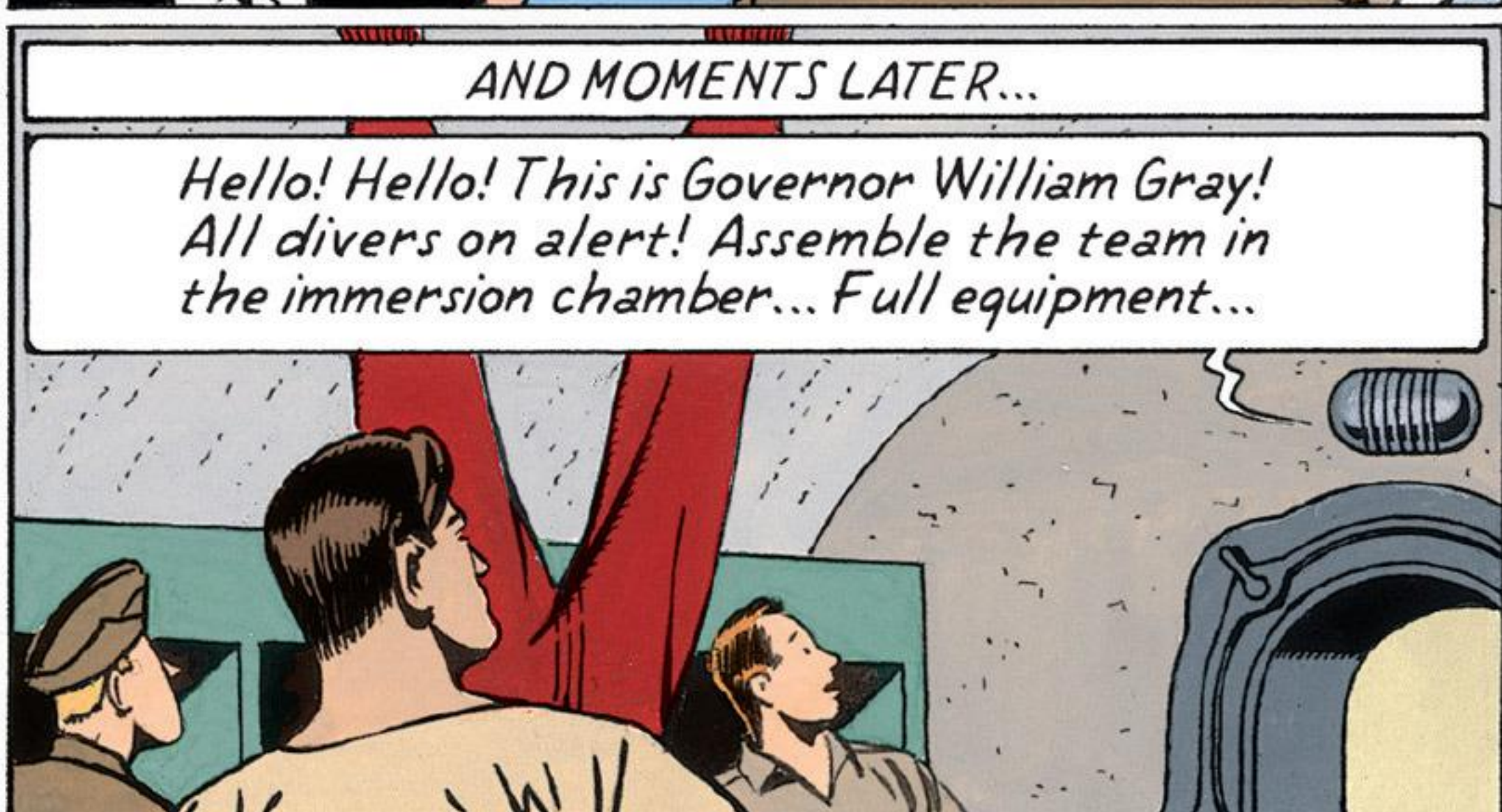
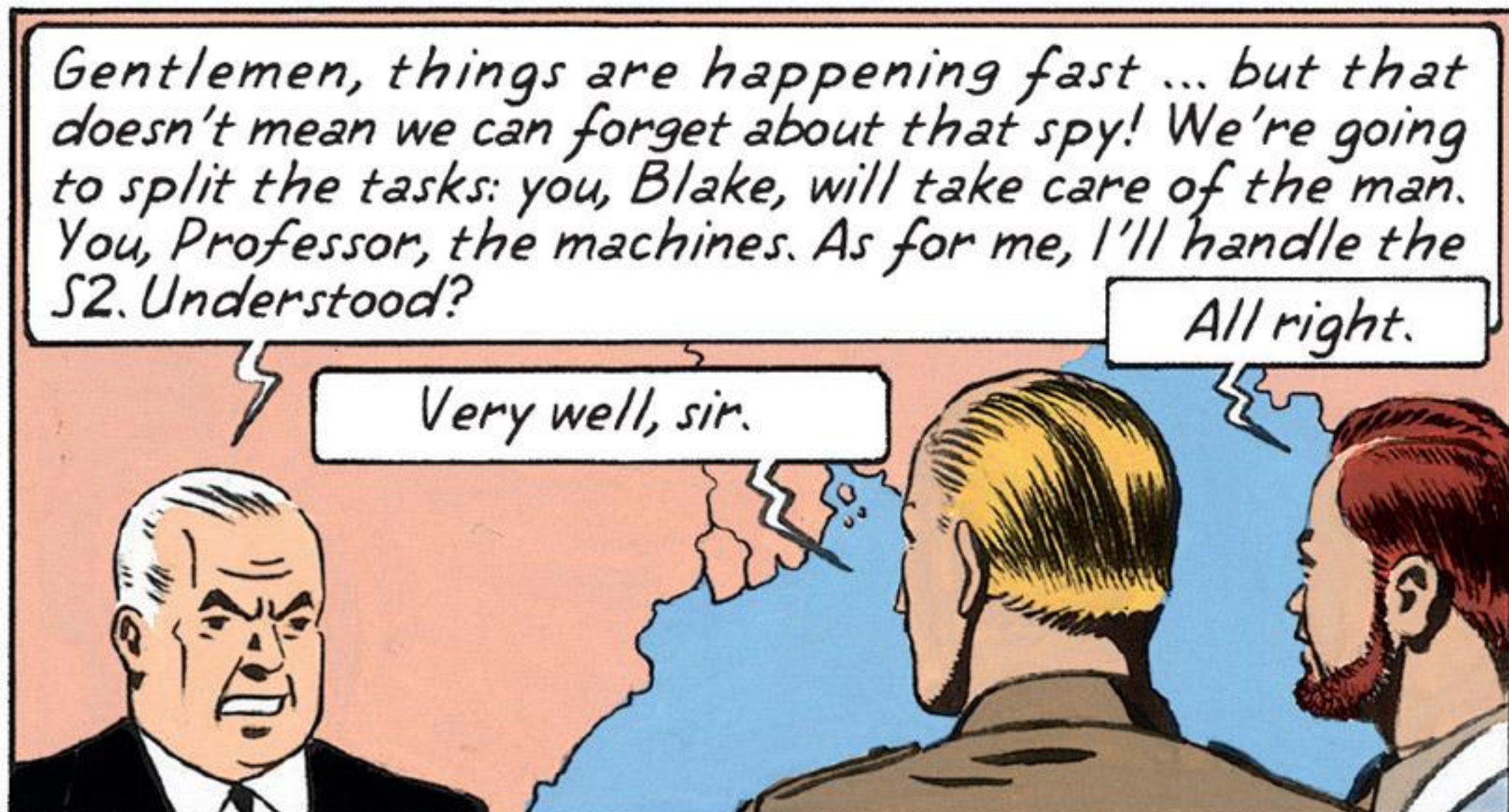
Hello! Hello! The major is urgently needed in the technical section... Room 8!...



BUT THE DOOR OPENS BRUSQUELY...

Captain! Mallow's just been found at the bottom of an air shaft!





PUSHING ASIDE THE STRANGE FEELING OF DREAD THAT HAS SEIZED HIM, MORTIMER HURRIES ON AND SOON REACHES THE RADIOCHEMICAL LAB. THE DOOR, LEFT AJAR, LETS OUT A THIN RAY OF YELLOW LIGHT. INSTINCTIVELY, THE PROFESSOR TURNS OFF HIS TORCH...



...BUT HE HASN'T TAKEN FIVE STEPS WHEN HE SUDDENLY STRIKES HIS FOOT AGAINST SOMETHING...



POINTING HIS TORCH AT THE OBSTACLE, MORTIMER CAN'T KEEP IN A STIFLED CRY: HIS ASSISTANT TRENTER IS LYING THERE, FACE DOWN AND UNCONSCIOUS...



BUT A FAINT NOISE COMING FROM THE LABORATORY STARTLES HIM.



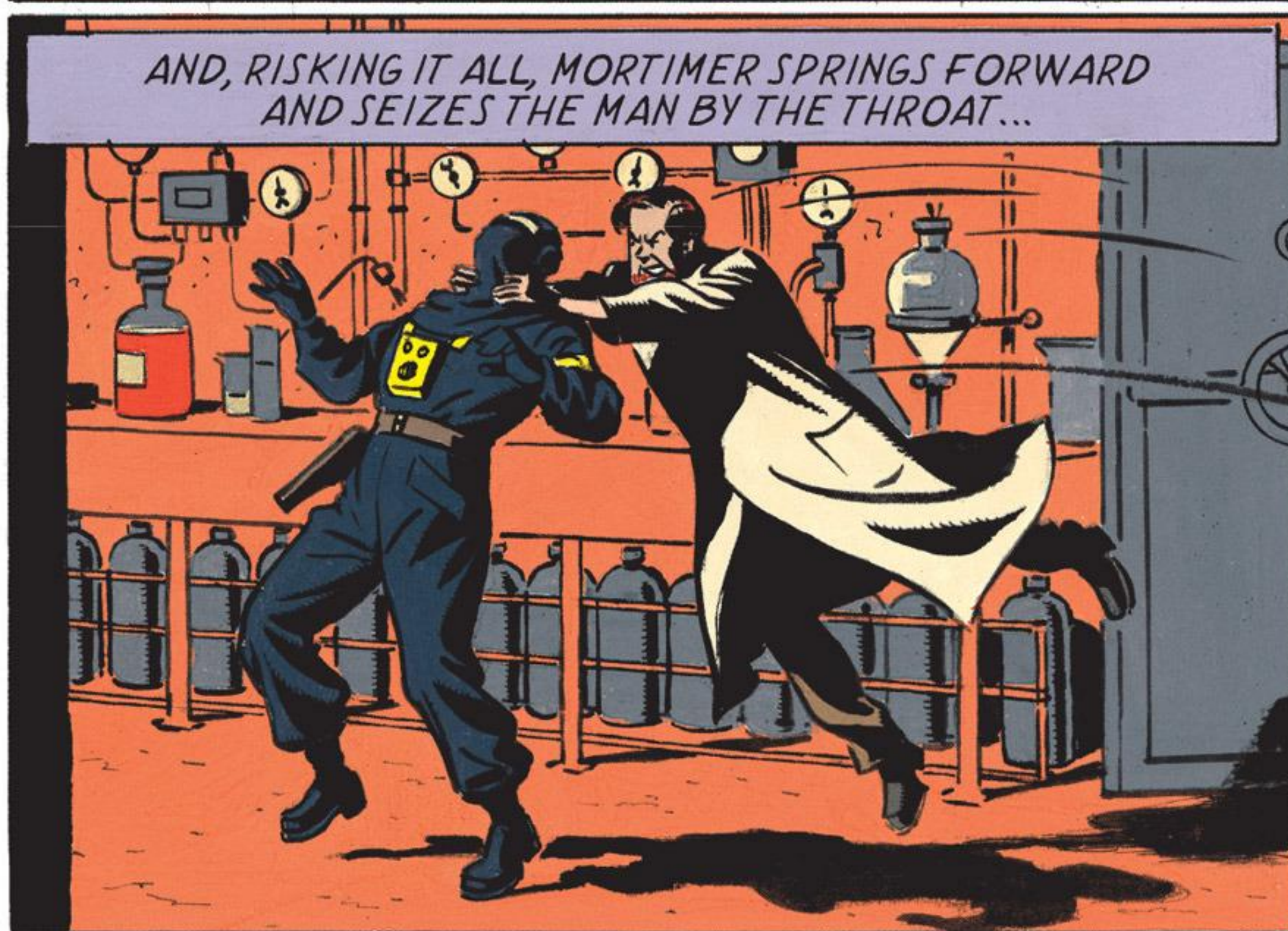
CREEPING CAREFULLY FORWARD, HE DISCOVERS, STANDING IN THE LIGHT OF A STORM LANTERN, A.C.C. ATTEMPTING TO OPEN THE ARMoured SAFE WHERE THE DANGEROUS RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS ARE KEPT.



Hell!! If he opens that safe we're done for! I'm unarmed but there's no choice!



AND, RISKING IT ALL, MORTIMER SPRINGS FORWARD AND SEIZES THE MAN BY THE THROAT...



...BUT HIS OPPONENT, QUICK AS LIGHTNING, DUCKS AND MANAGES TO SQUIRM FREE, LEAVING HIS HOOD IN THE HANDS OF HIS ATTACKER. THE PROFESSOR, TAKEN ABACK...



...HAS NO TIME TO REACT. HIS FOE HAS TURNED ROUND TO FACE HIM, PISTOL IN HAND AND A THREATENING EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE...



Yes, the very same, my dear professor. My prestige was at stake and I refused to let another solve this problem... Oh, you had me well and truly fooled in Karachi, but the time to settle accounts is near, and I intend to pay back everything I owe you - with interest!



And now, hands in the air - and no monkey business, please... I'm no Dr Fo!... Go on, back... Good!



KEEPING HIS GUN TRAINED ON MORTIMER, OLRIK RETURNS TO OPENING THE SAFE.

I had run out of atomilite and was finding myself rather inconvenienced when I remembered that you kept something here that's much more ... effective!





AND NOW, PROFESSOR, HANDS IN THE AIR – AND NO MONKEY BUSINESS, PLEASE... I'M NO DR FO!!!

WHILE MORTIMER CONFRONTS OLRIK IN THE LABORATORY, NASIR, BACK FROM HIS MISSION, ENTERS CAPTAIN BLAKE'S C.P., FROM WHERE THE OFFICER IS COORDINATING THE SEARCH.

Salaam, Captain!

Hello, Nasir! What news?

Sahib, Makran is full of troops, and the Imperials have found the trucks' hiding place. Moreover, many indications point towards the prisoner convoy being a mere ploy to infiltrate spies into the base...

I'll say! They can call it a resounding success!...

...We've just found out that a traitor managed to sneak into the ranks of the C.C. That wretch has already blown up part of the power plant and is probably about to strike again... But go on, what else do you know?...

...According to the news from Karachi, Colonel Olrik hasn't been seen in three weeks...

What did you say?... Olrik's disappeared????... Good Lord! Could it be him?!... Tell me, what does he look like? Tall?

Yes, tall, dark, hawk-nosed... But sahib Mortimer would have recognised him, Captain...

No doubt, but as it happens the professor wasn't at the inspection that night... Well, I will get to the bottom of it...

Hello!... Is that you, old chap?... Ah!... And did the professor say where he was going?... To the atomic centre? Alone?... Fine...

If Olrik's here, we can expect the worst! Quick, Nasir, take this lamp and let's dash over there... Mortimer's absence worries me for some reason...

Yes, Captain.

IN THE MEANTIME, OLRIK HAS MANAGED TO OPEN THE LABORATORY'S SAFE AND...

Ah! This will do nicely!

...HAVING REMOVED A SERIES OF GLASS PHIALS CONTAINING RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES, IS ABOUT TO PUT HIS HOOD BACK ON WHEN...

Hey! But...

...how about we settle our scores first... eh?... What do you think, my dear professor?

Personally, I think such a question is premature, Colonel! Hands up!!!

The game is up, Olrik!... Drop your weapon! Nasir, go and tie up his hands...

Curses!!!

By Jove, Blake, that's what I call arriving in the nick of time! A minute later and our friend would have sent me to meet my ancestors!

AS NASIR ADVANCES TOWARDS HIM, ROPE IN HAND, OLRİK SEEMS MOMENTARILY CRUSHED BY THE SUDDEN REVERSAL OF FORTUNE...

Your turn now, dear fellow!



...BUT TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE PRECISE MOMENT WHEN, BY STEPPING IN FRONT OF HIM, NASIR BLOCKS BLAKE'S LINE OF SIGHT, THE COLONEL SHOVS THE SERGEANT ASIDE AND LEAPS TOWARDS THE SPOT WHERE HE'S LEFT THE PHIALS OF MERCURIUM.

You don't have me yet!!!



HAVING GRABBED ONE OF THEM, HE FACES HIS OPPONENTS, FULL OF RESOLVE.

If any of you takes a single step forward, I will crush this phial!... And you know what that would mean!!!...

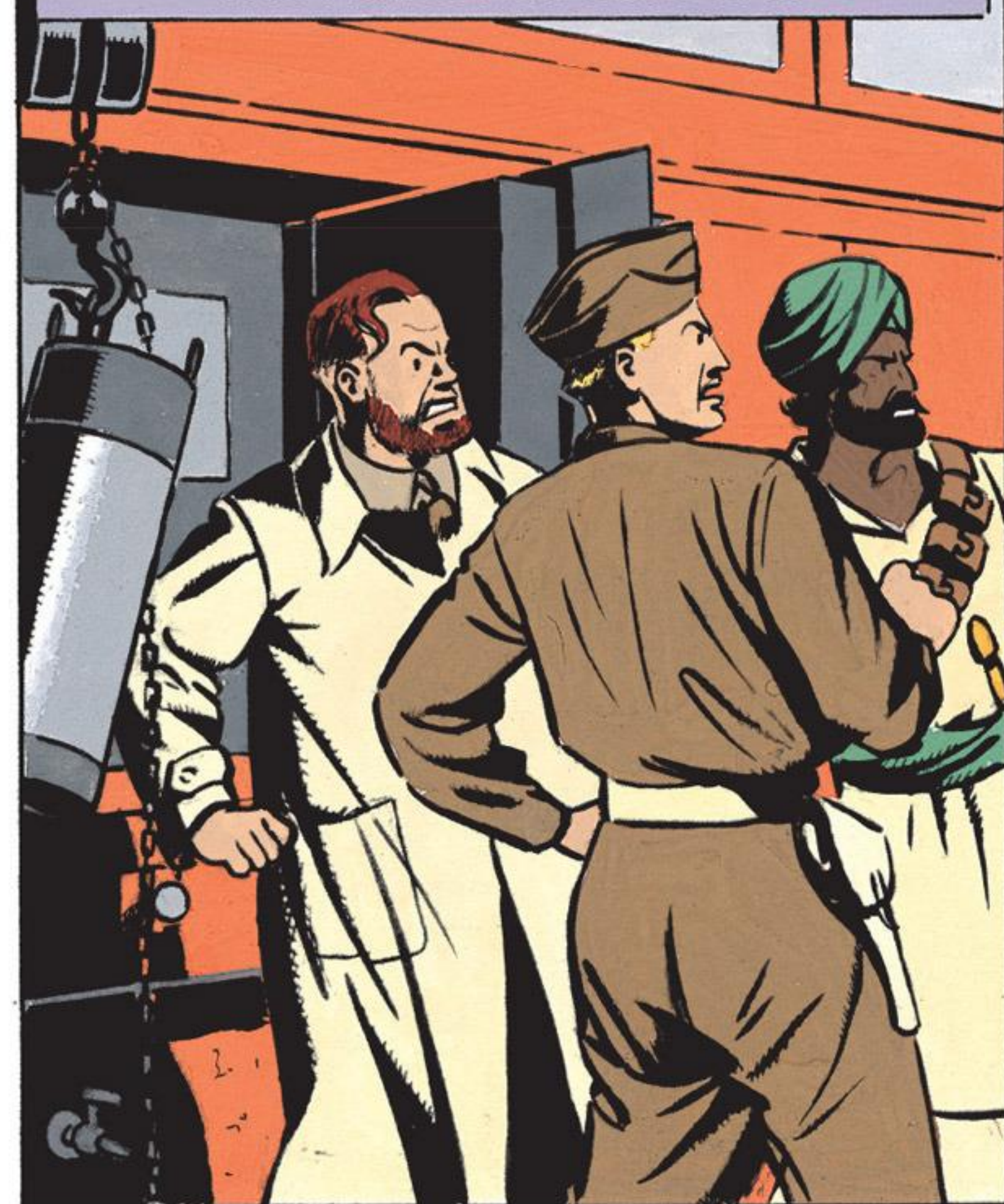


OLRIK, ARM RAISED AND READY TO SMASH THE FRAGILE GLASS CONTAINER, MOVES FORWARD THREATENINGLY...

Put down that sub-machine gun!... Go on, step back, all of you!... Clear the door!!!



FULLY AWARE OF THE DRAMATIC CONSEQUENCES THAT WOULD FOLLOW IF SUCH A THREAT WAS CARRIED OUT, THE THREE MEN COMPLY...



STILL BRANDISHING HIS DIABOLICAL INSTRUMENT, OLRİK REACHES THE DOOR AND PREPARES TO STEP ACROSS THE THRESHOLD WHEN...



...CHANGING HIS MIND, WITH AN ANGRY GESTURE HE THROWS THE PHIAL TOWARDS THE GROUP.



THE DEADLY PROJECTILE PASSES MERE INCHES ABOVE THE HEAD OF MORTIMER, WHO BARELY HAS TIME TO DUCK, AND...



...SAILS THROUGH ONE OF THE OPENINGS IN THE LEAD WALL BEHIND WHICH ALL THE EXPERIMENTS ARE CONDUCTED...



REACTING INSTANTLY, MORTIMER SLAMS THE LEAD DOOR CLOSED, ISOLATING THE LABORATORY.



JUST THEN, THE POWER COMES BACK ON, FLOODING THE ROOM WITH STARK ELECTRIC LIGHT...

...BUT OLRİK, SEEING THE FAILURE OF HIS ATTACK AND HIS ENEMIES READY TO RUSH AT HIM, QUICKLY CLOSSES THE DOOR...



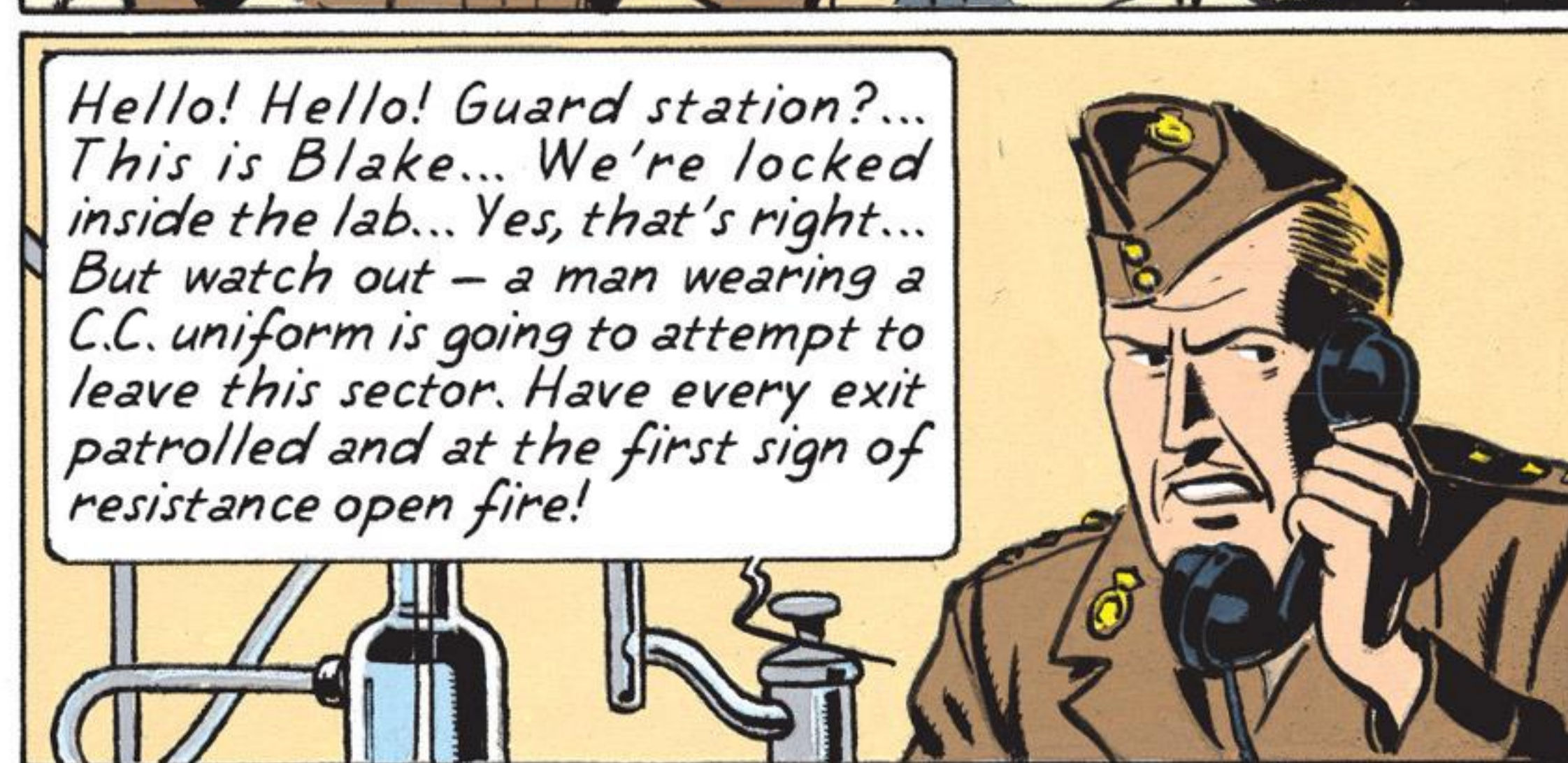
...AND LOCKS IT FROM THE OUTSIDE.

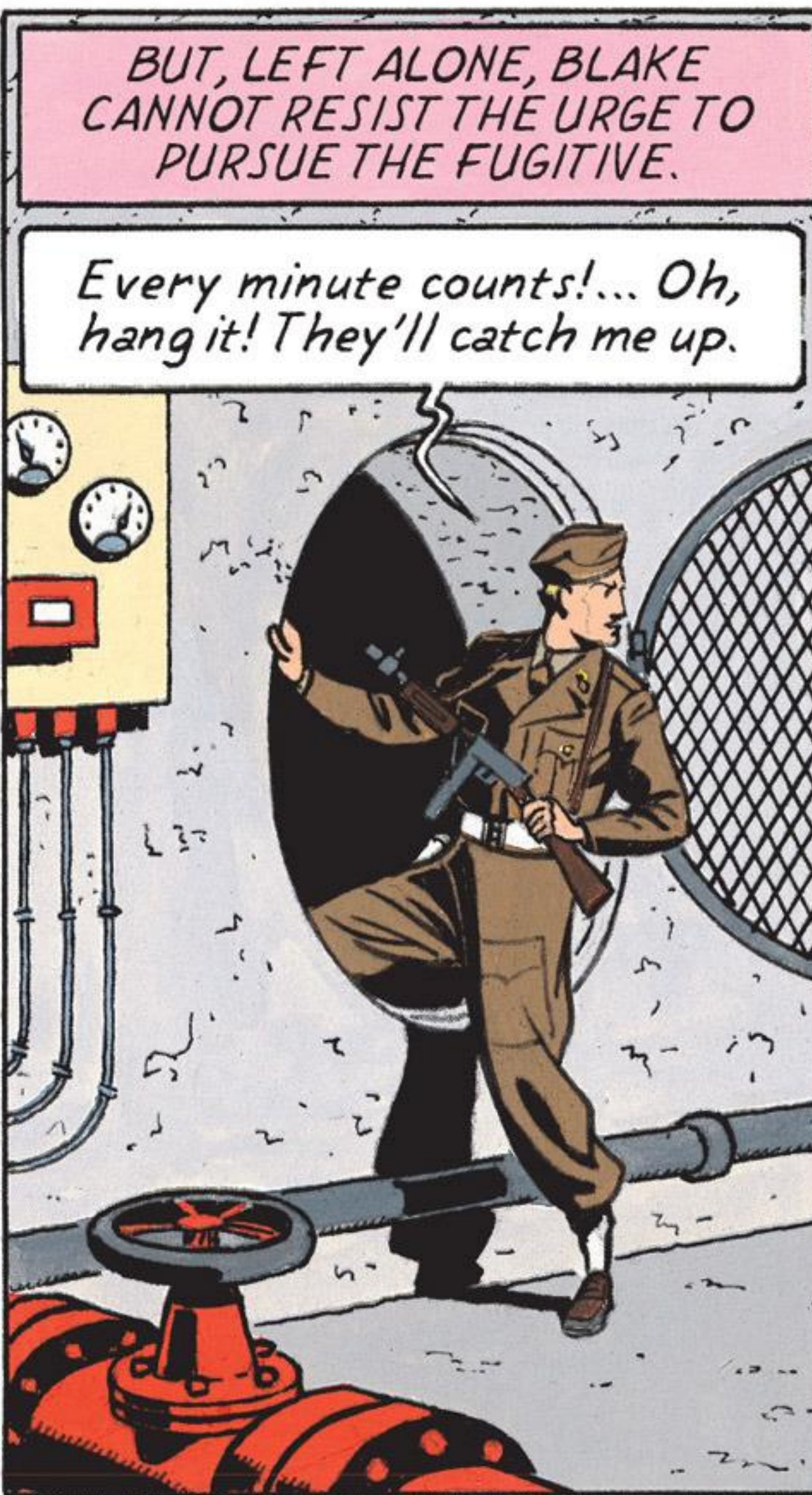
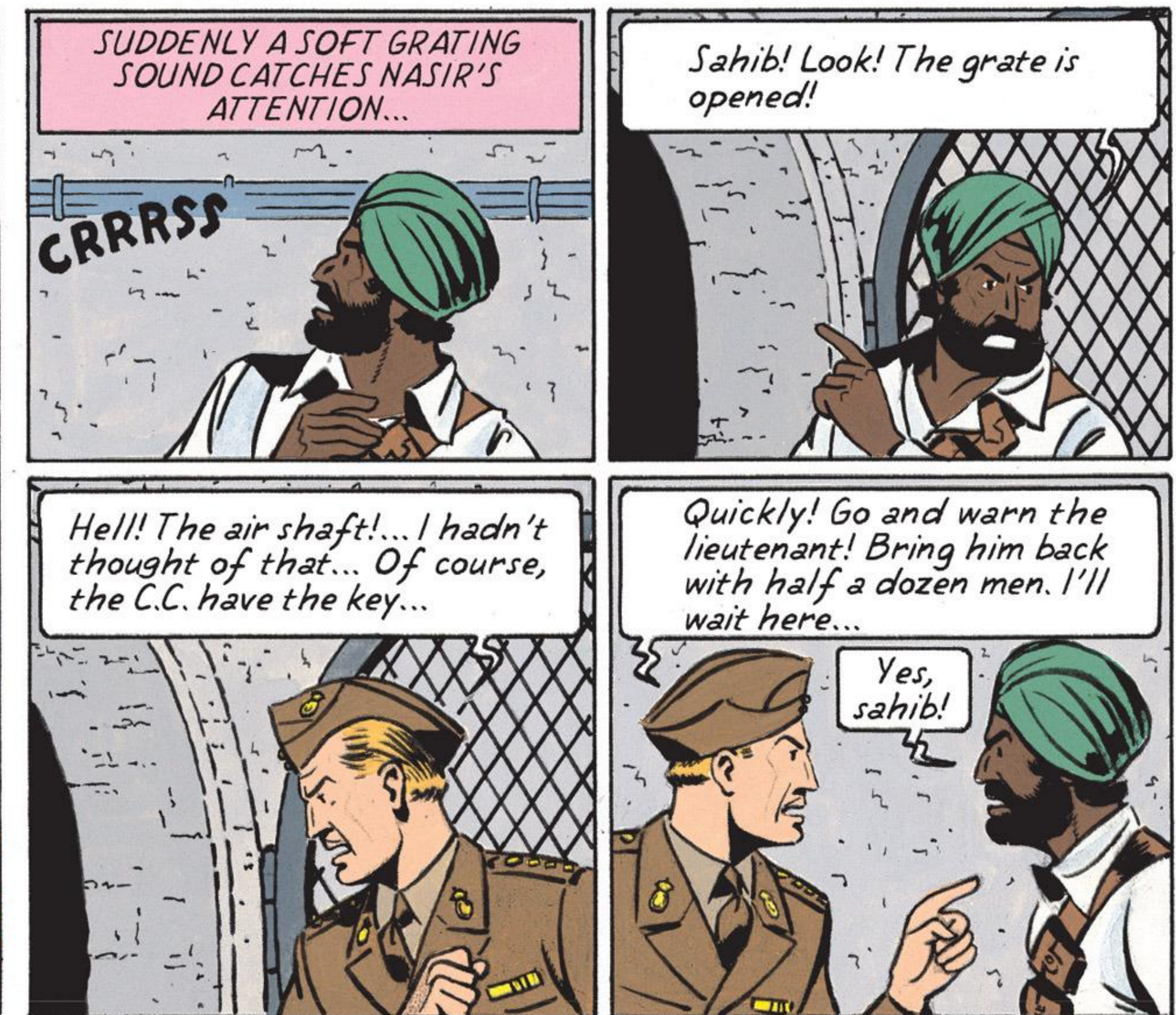
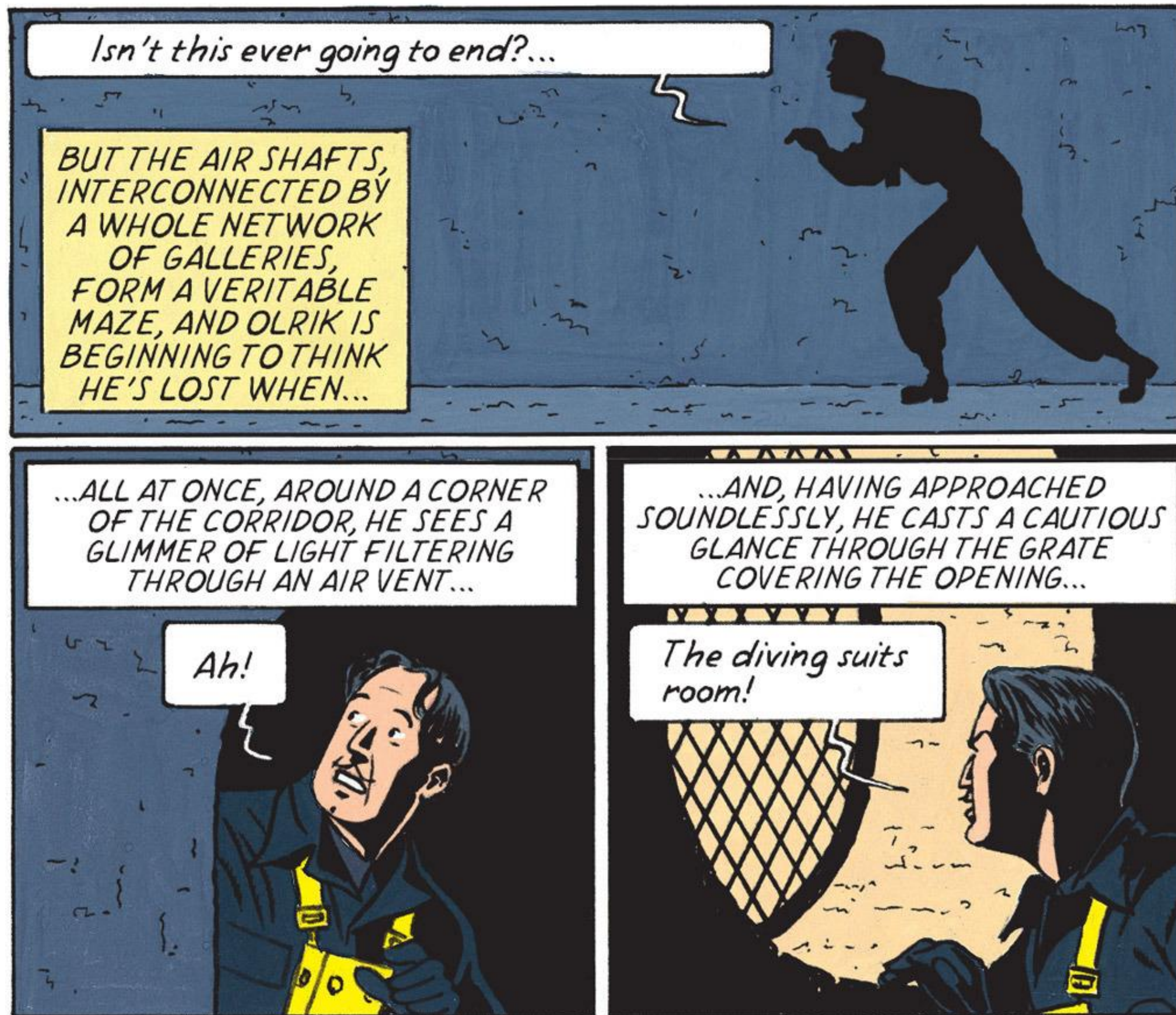
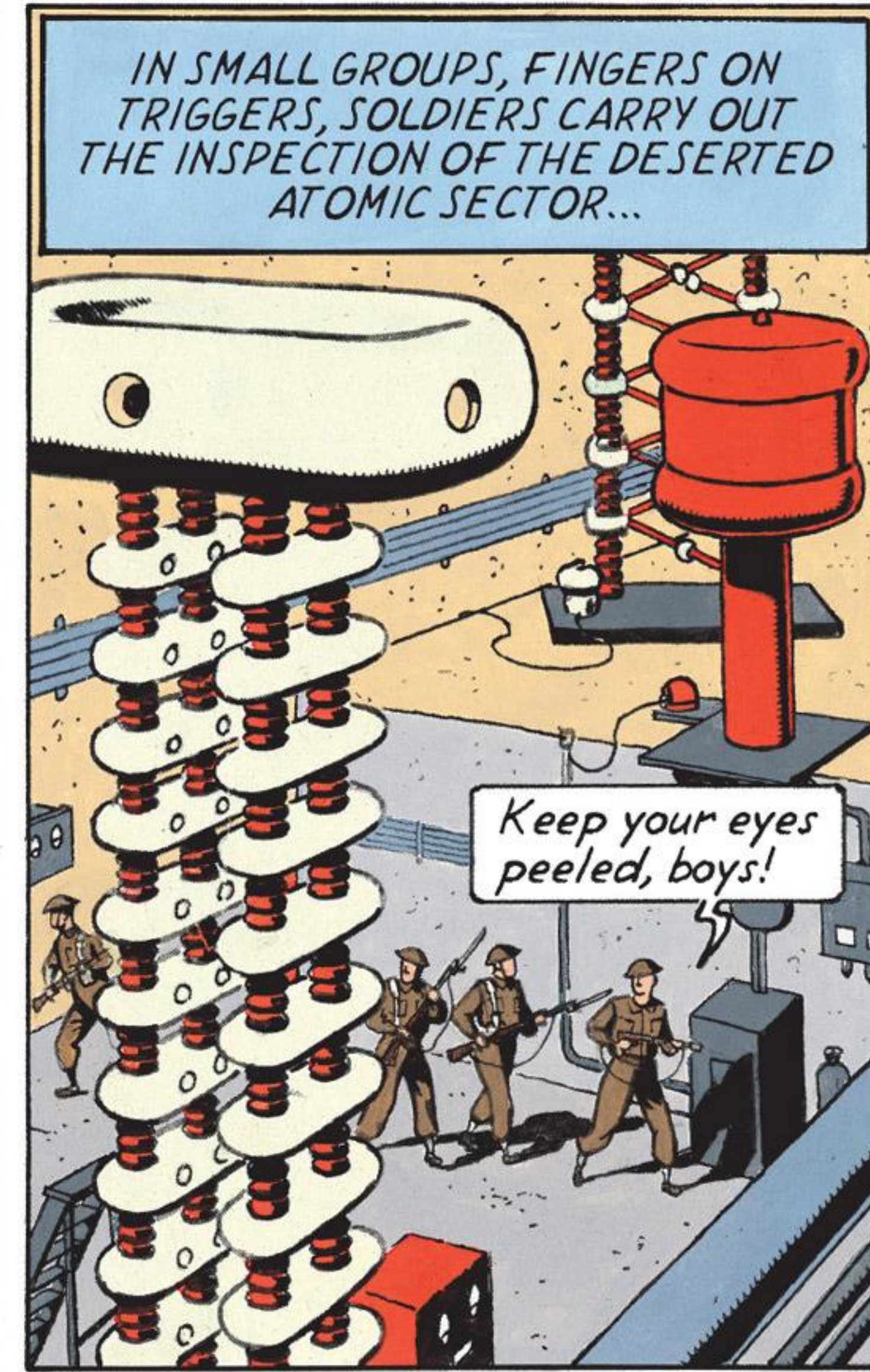
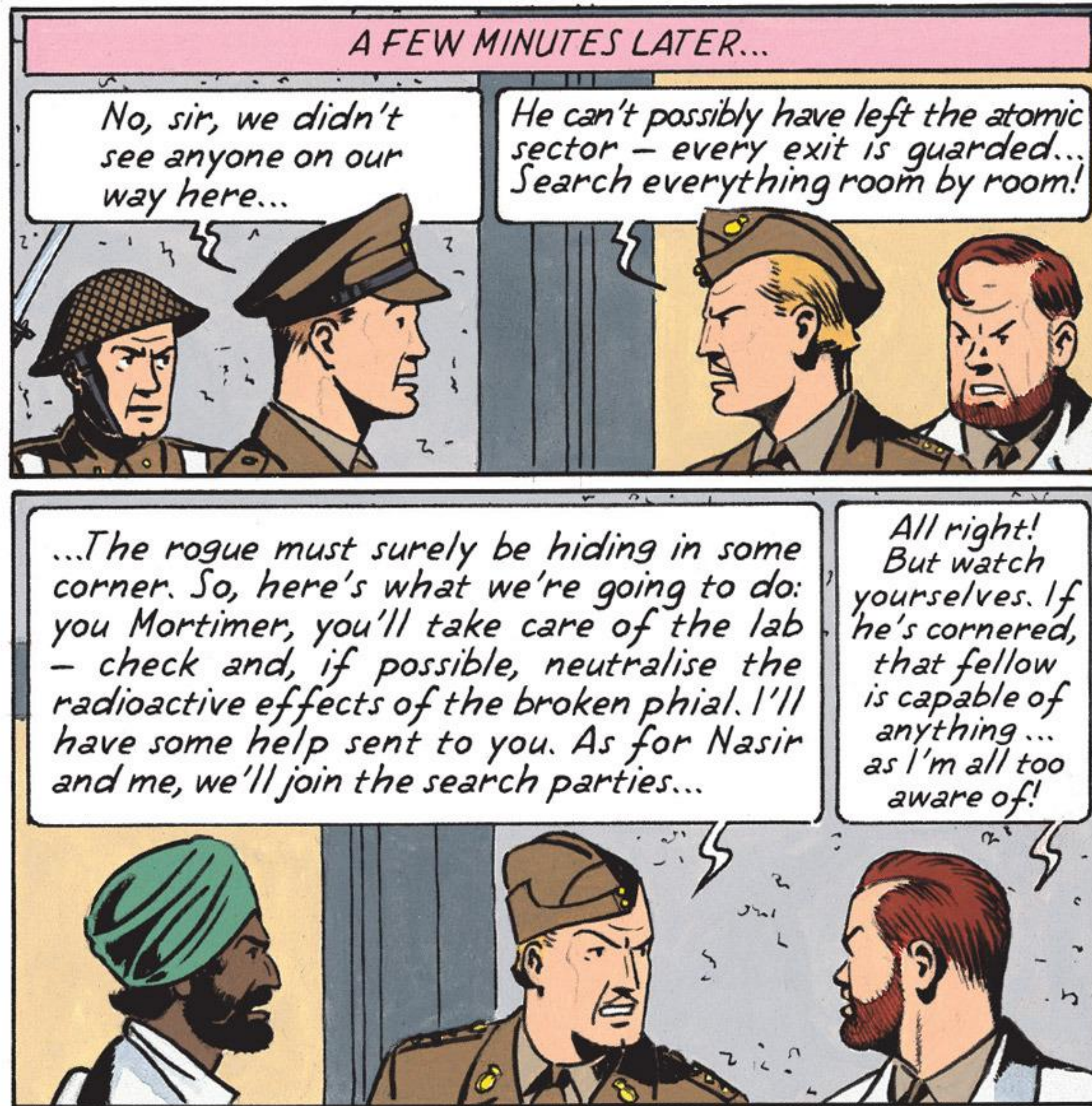
Oh, he won't go very far now that the light's back. Speaking of which...

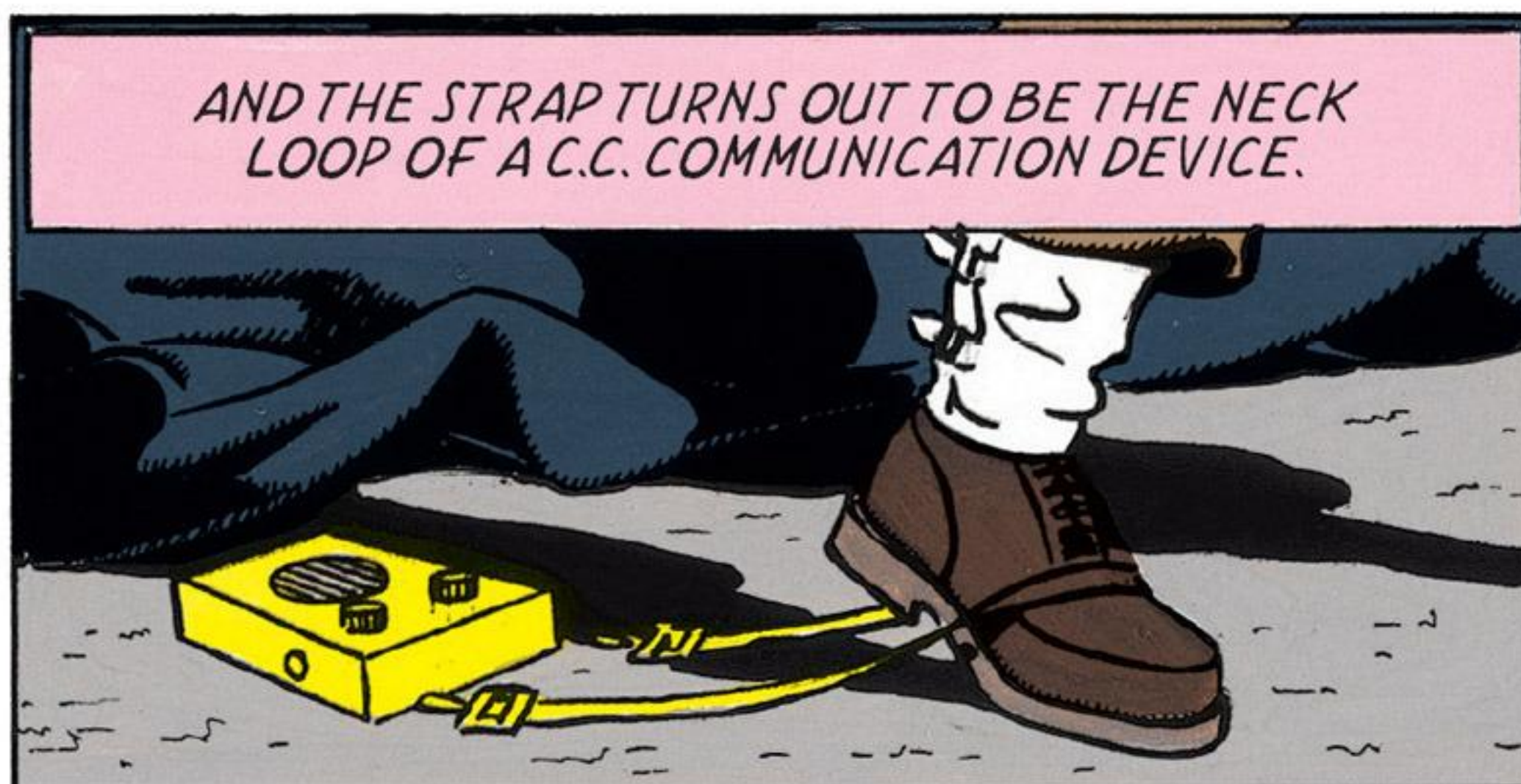
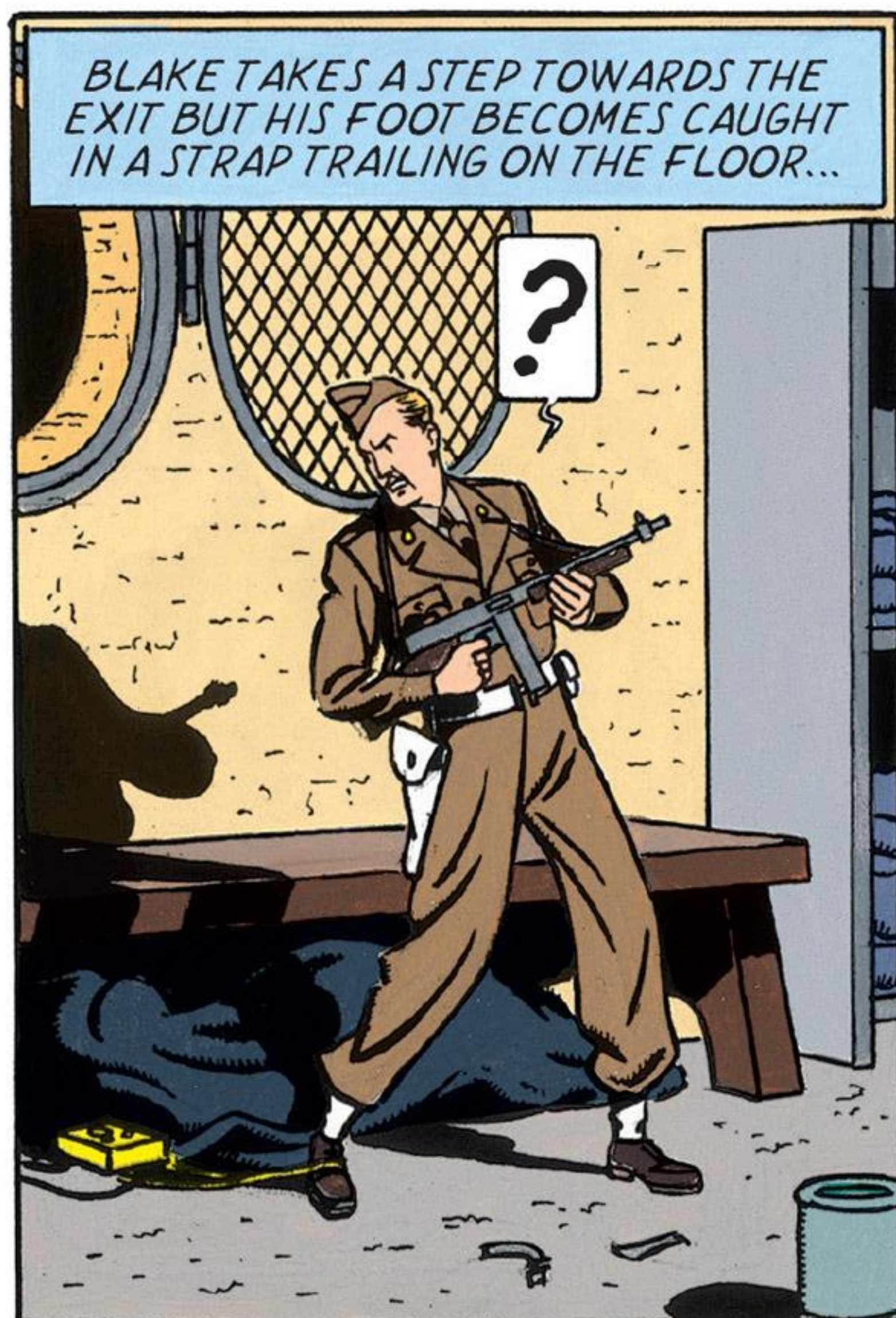
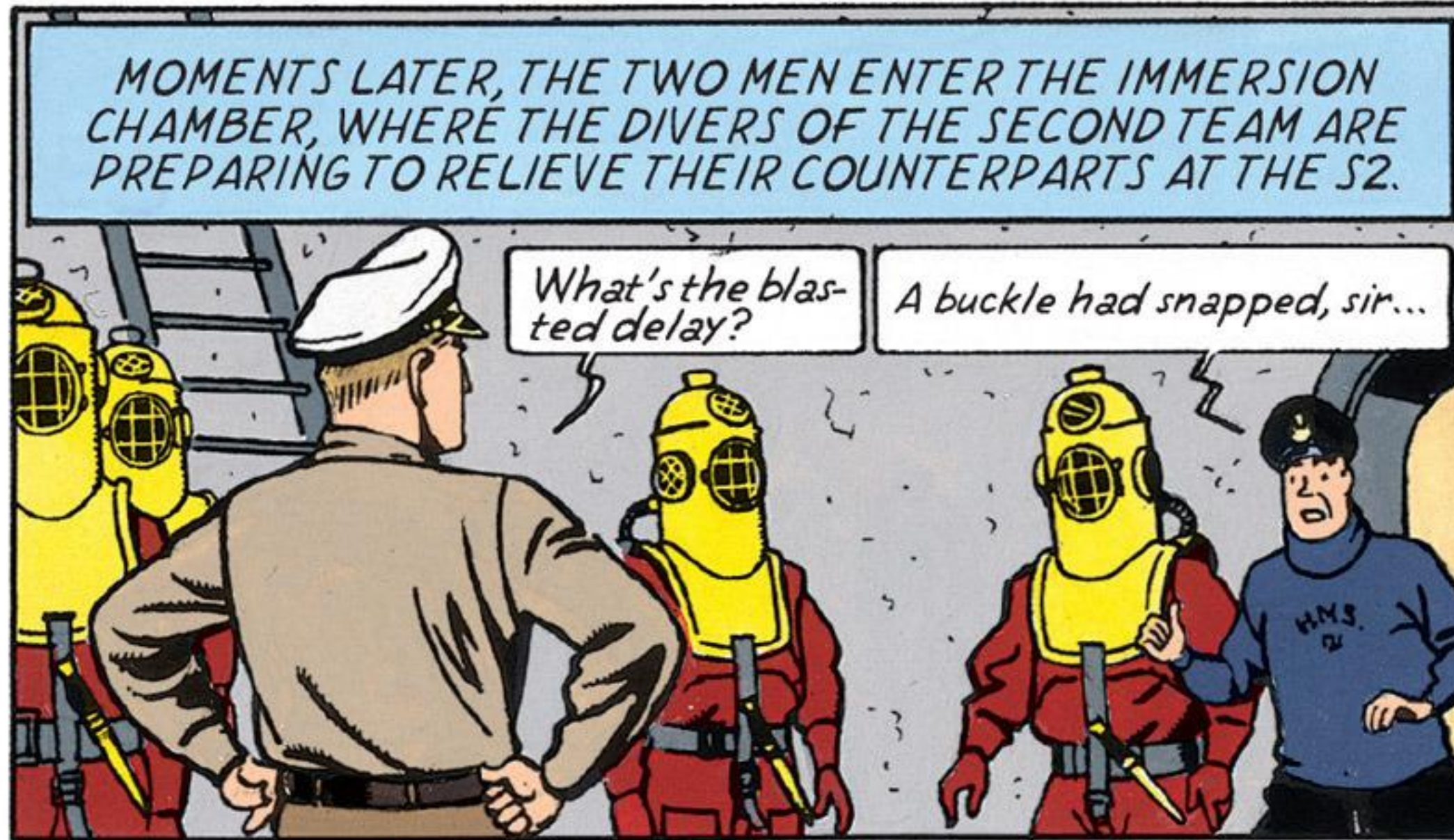
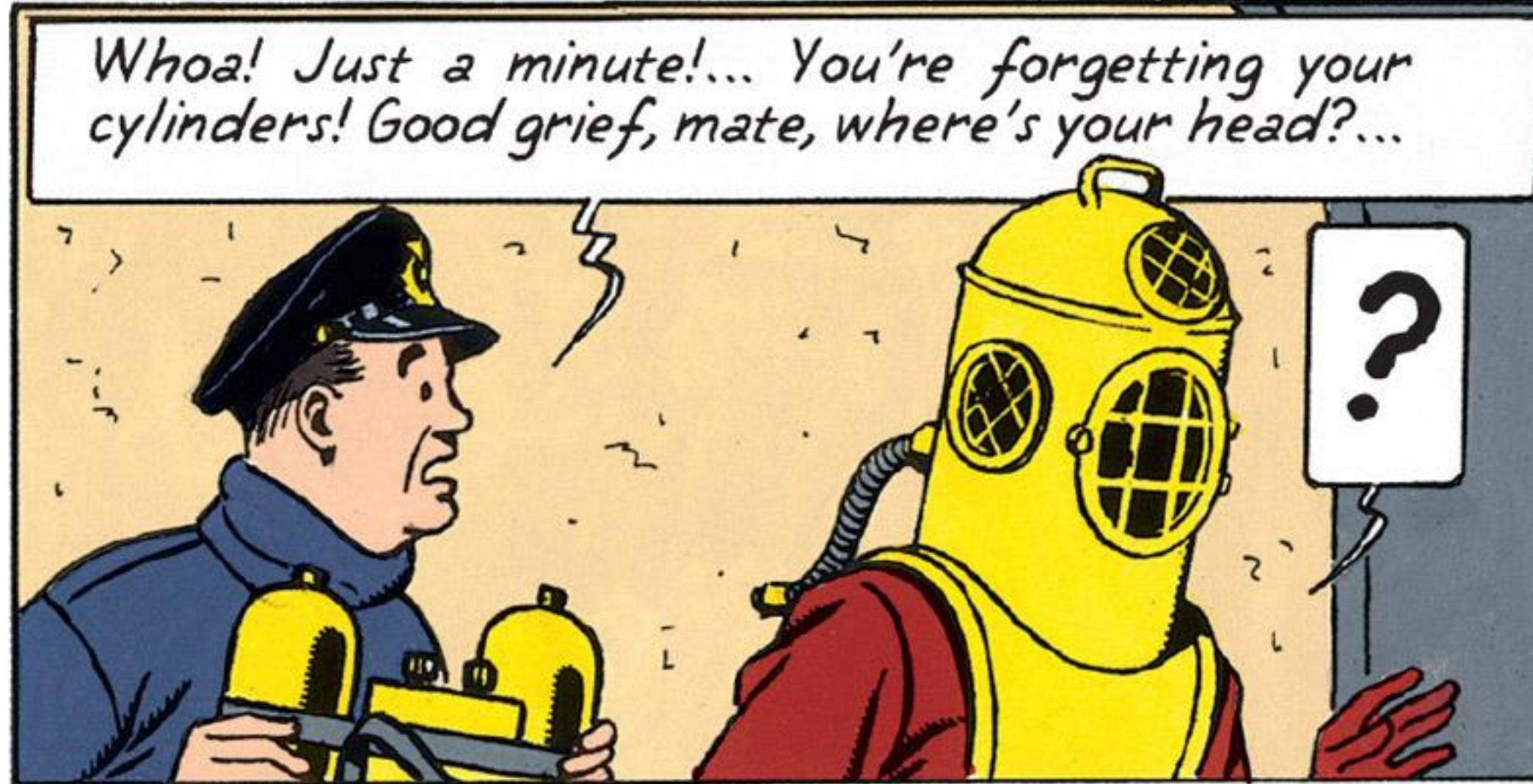
Too late!!!

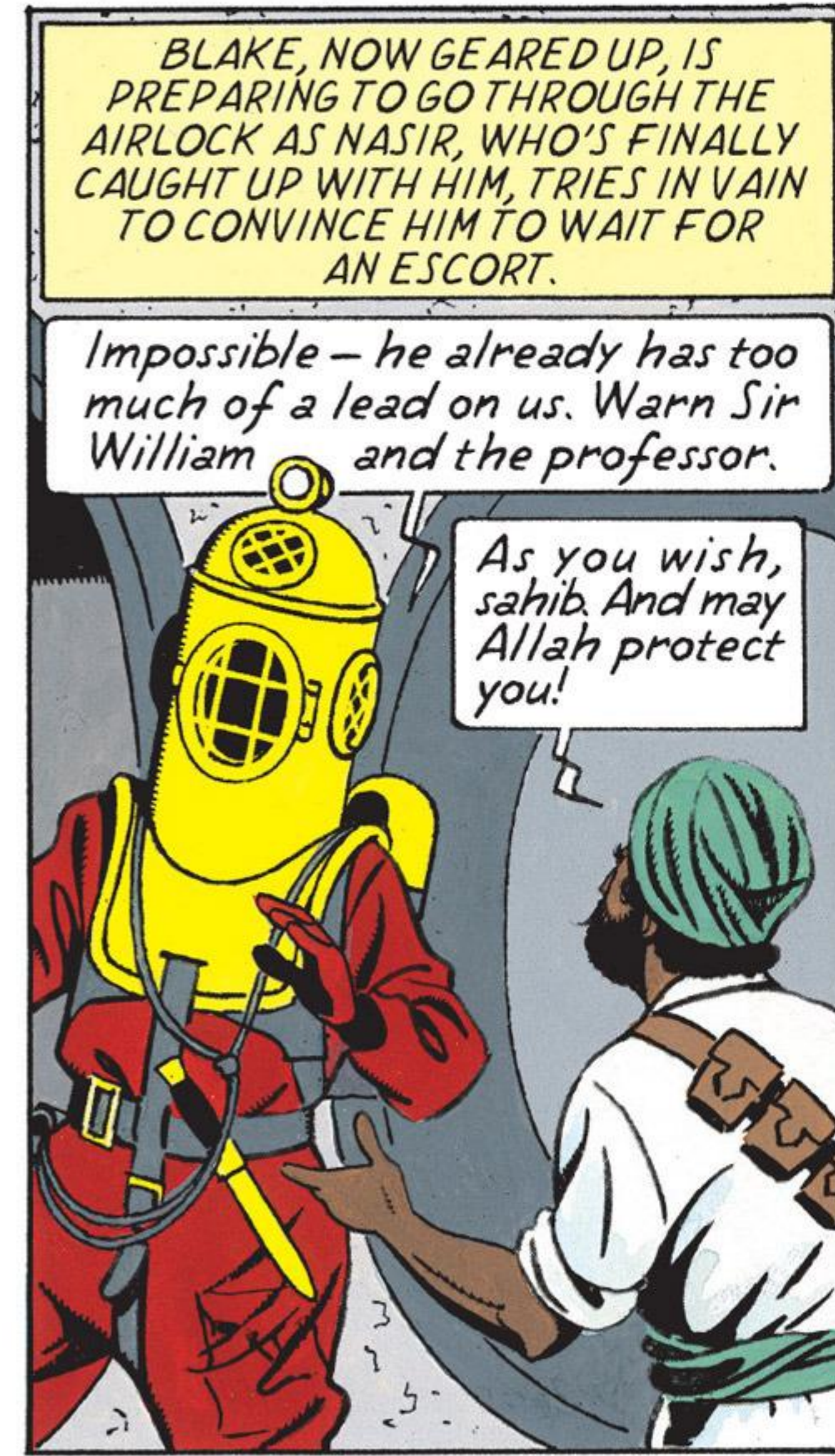
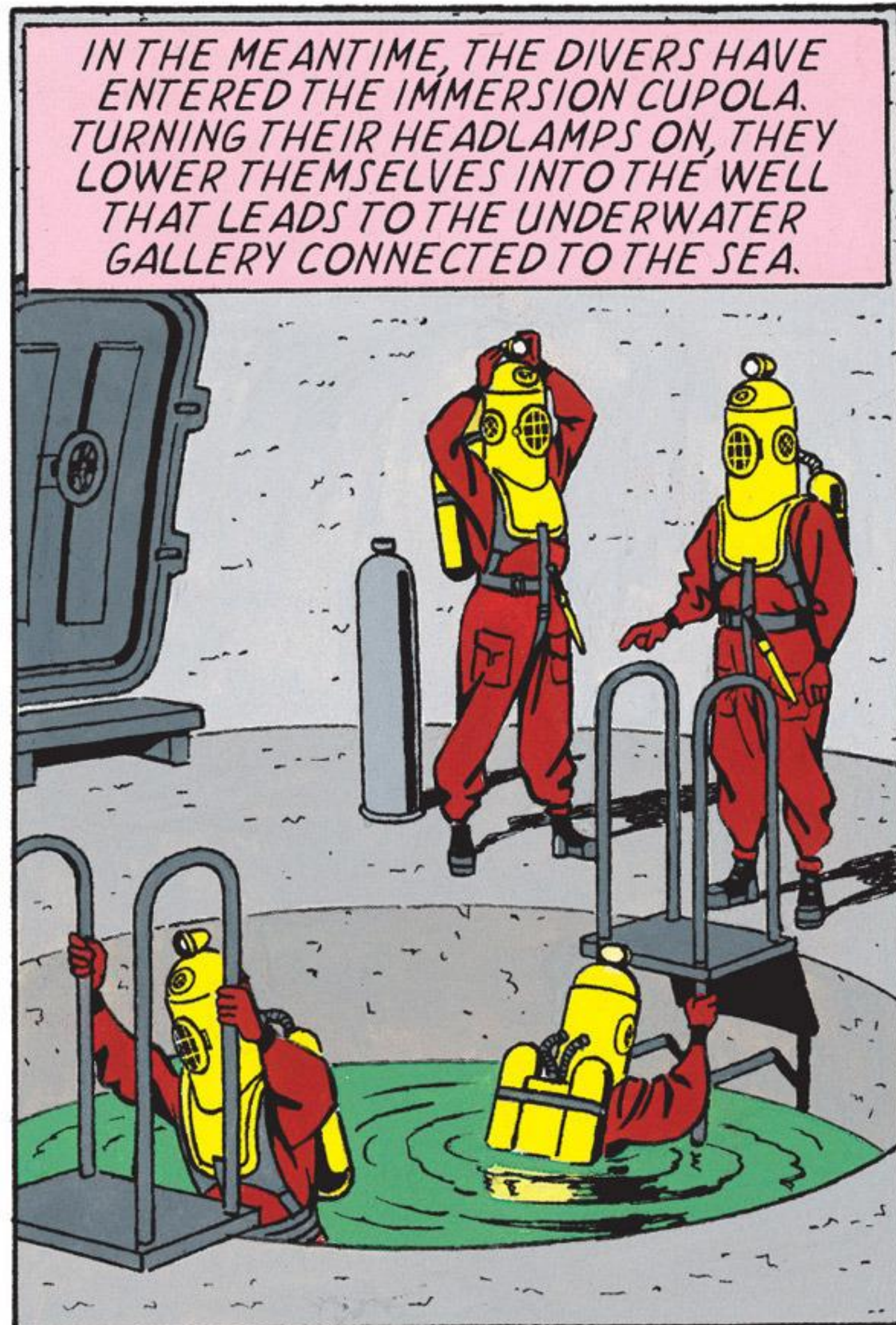


Hello! Hello! Guard station?... This is Blake... We're locked inside the lab... Yes, that's right... But watch out - a man wearing a C.C. uniform is going to attempt to leave this sector. Have every exit patrolled and at the first sign of resistance open fire!

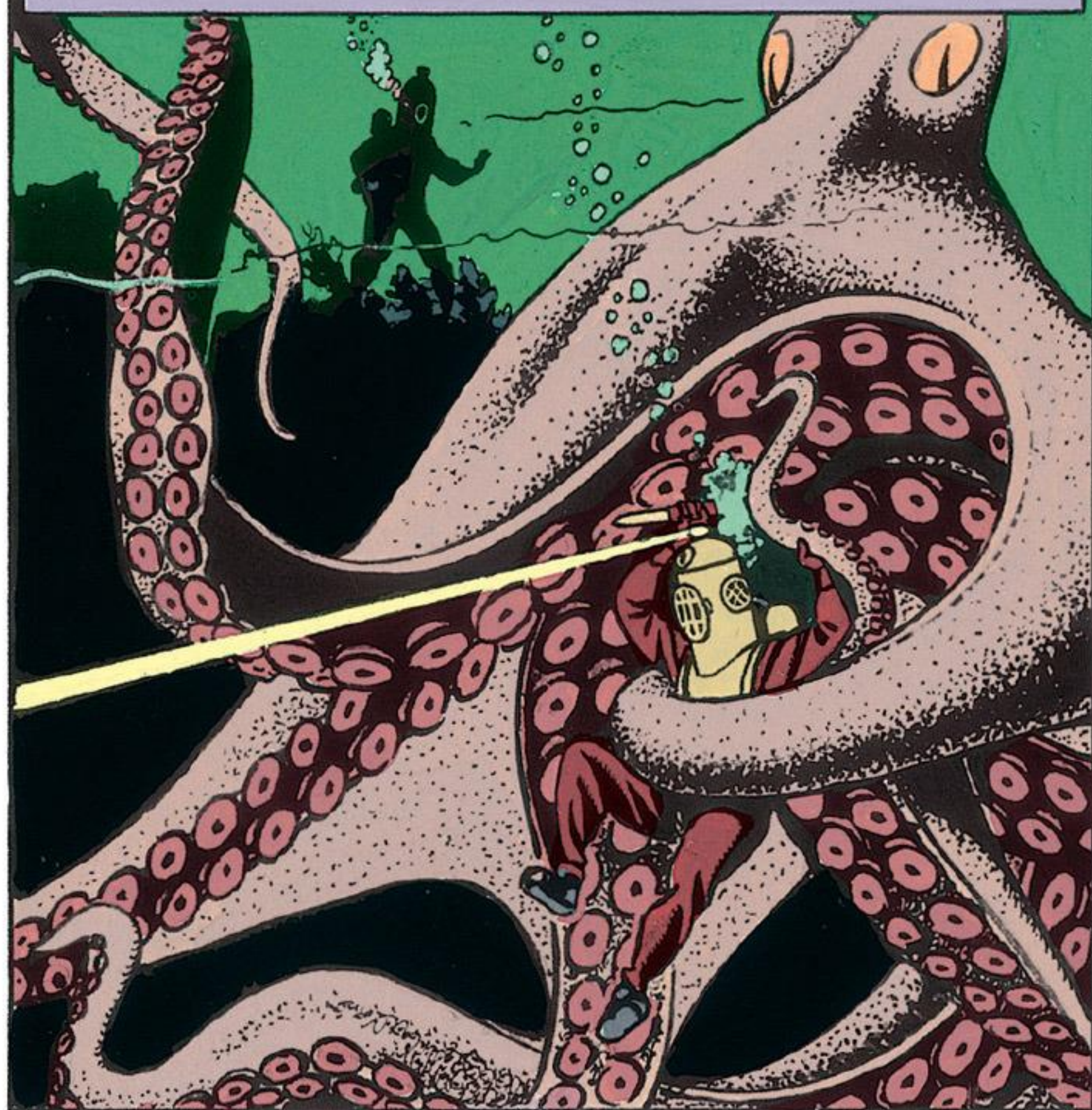




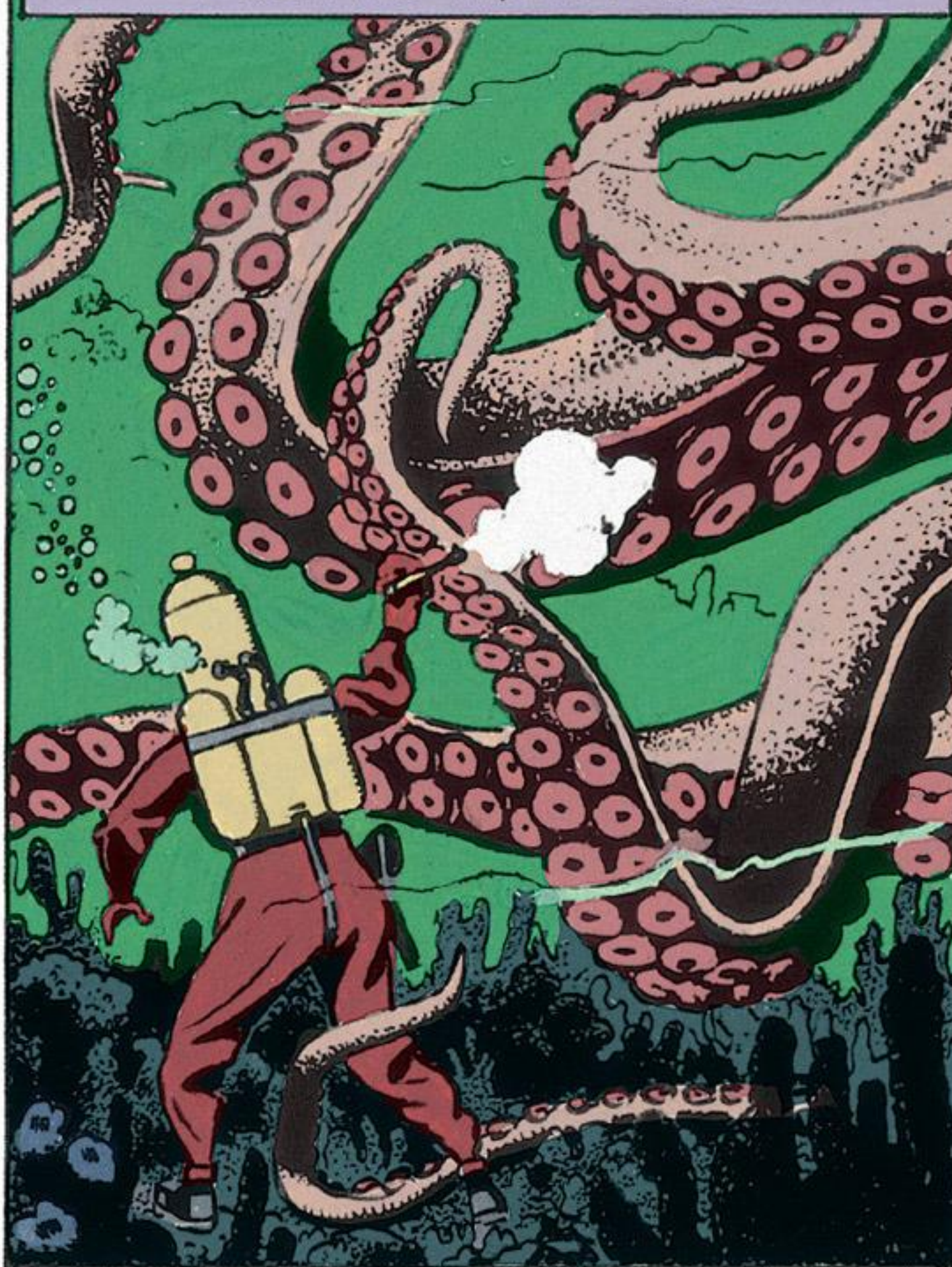




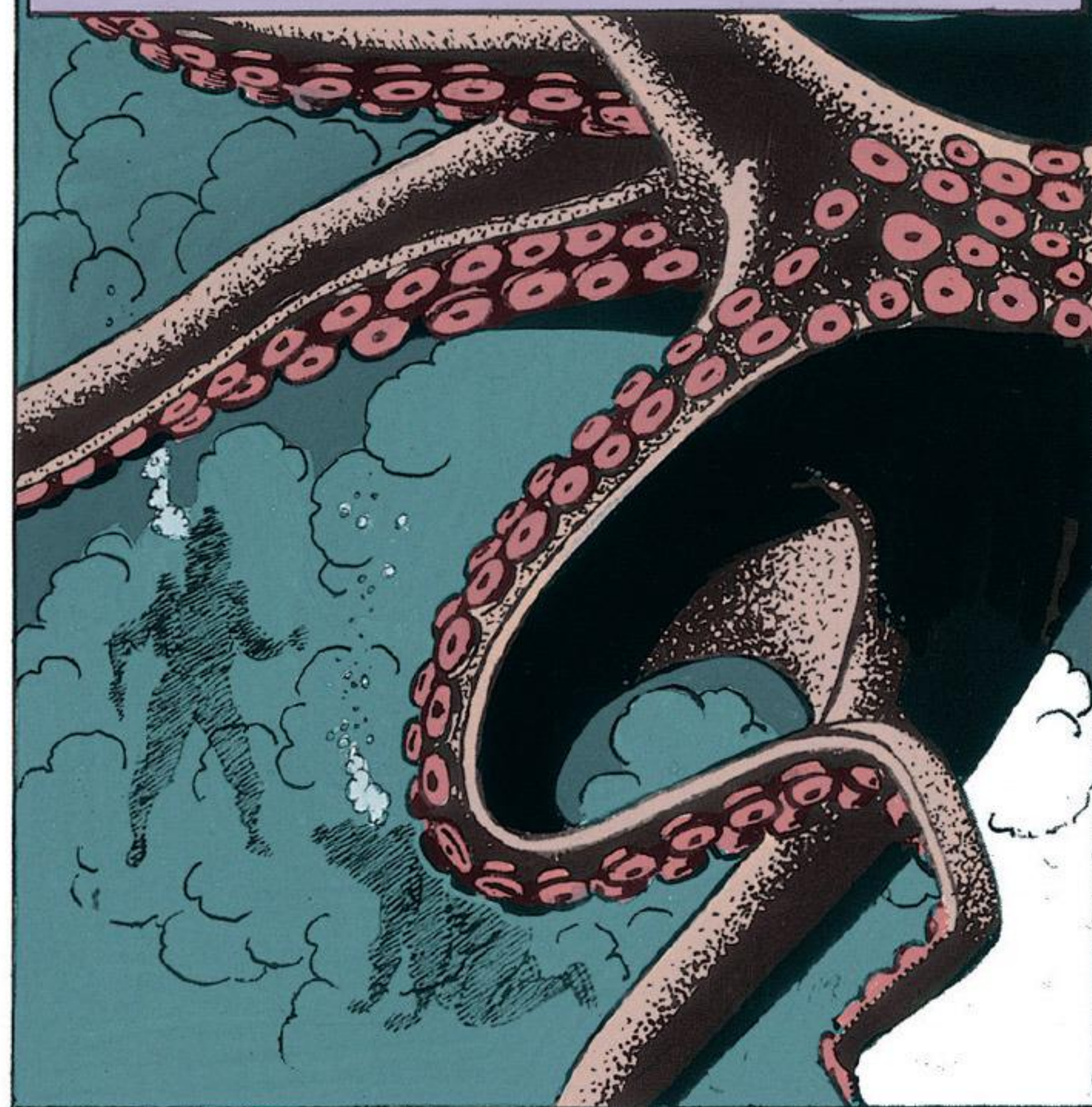
BEFORE HIM, IN A ROCKY DEPRESSION, OLRİK, KNIFE IN HAND, IS FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE AGAINST A GIGANTIC OCTOPUS IN A HIDEOUS TANGLE OF TENTACLES.



WITHOUT HESITATION, BLAKE LEAPS INTO THE FRAY AND, AIMING AT ONE OF THE ENORMOUS GLASSY EYES, RIDDLES THE MONSTER WITH BULLETS FROM HIS 'AQUATIC GUN'.



THE CEPHALOPOD, DOUBTLESS SUFFERING DAMAGE TO A VITAL ORGAN, IMMEDIATELY RELEASES ITS GRIP AND JETS AWAY IN A GREAT CLOUD OF INK.



FEARING A NEW TREACHERY, BLAKE ADVANCES TOWARDS OLRİK. BUT THE COLONEL, SPRAWLED ON THE SAND AND EXHAUSTED, DROPS HIS KNIFE AND SIGNALS HIS SURRENDER...

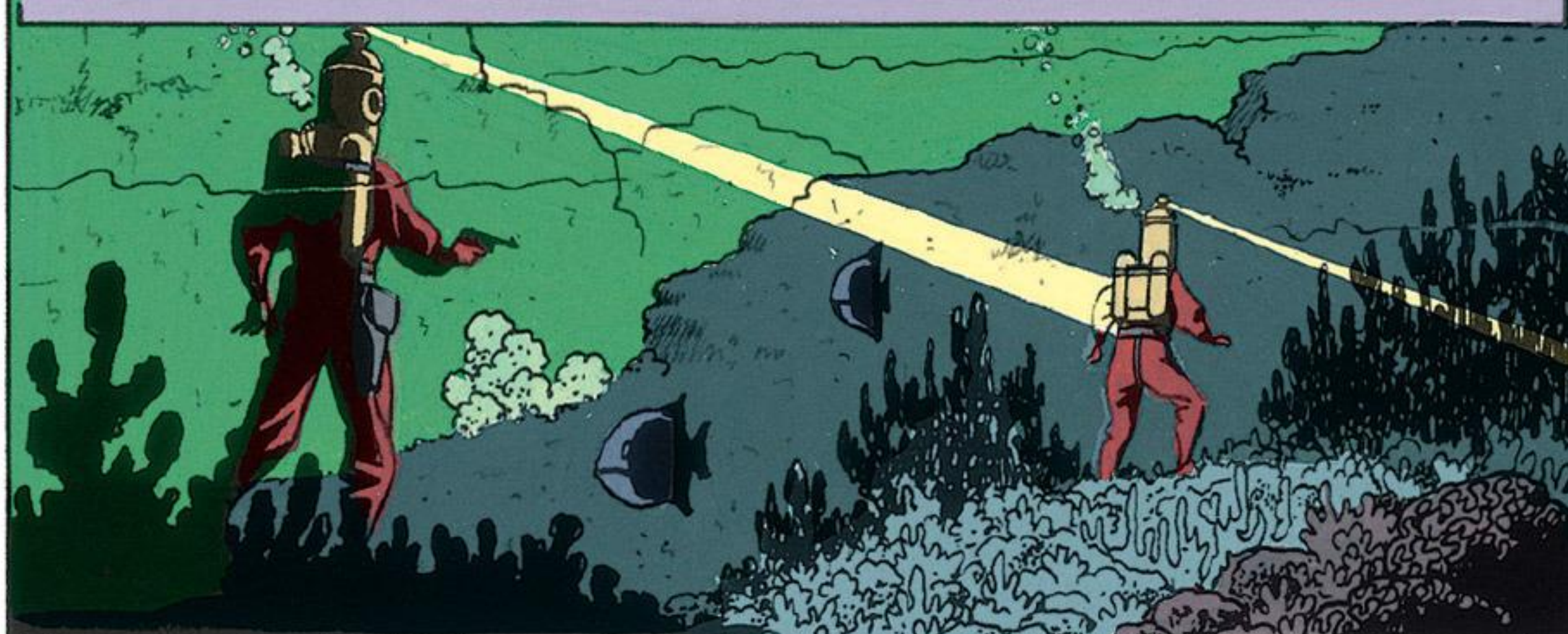


MEANWHILE, BACK AT BASE, A WORRIED MORTIMER IS PREPARING TO GO AND LOOK FOR HIS FRIEND WITH A FEW MEN.

Leaving alone – how reckless!!!



NEVERTHELESS, BLAKE AND HIS PRISONER ARE SLOWLY MAKING THEIR WAY BACK...



BUT WHILE CROSSING A JUMBLE OF ROCKS AND SEASHELLS, THE CAPTAIN FEELS HIS LEG ABRUPTLY CAUGHT IN A VICE... AN ENORMOUS BIVALVE HAS JUST CLOSED AROUND HIS FOOT...



LOSING HIS BALANCE AND FALLING DOWN, BLAKE ATTEMPTS TO SHOOT THE MOLLUSC THROUGH THE GAP IN THE SHELL, BUT IS DISMAYED TO DISCOVER THAT HIS WEAPON IS EMPTY!



OLRİK, NOT SEEING THE LIGHT FROM BLAKE'S HEADLAMP ANY MORE, TURNS ROUND. SPOTTING THE BRITON ON THE GROUND...

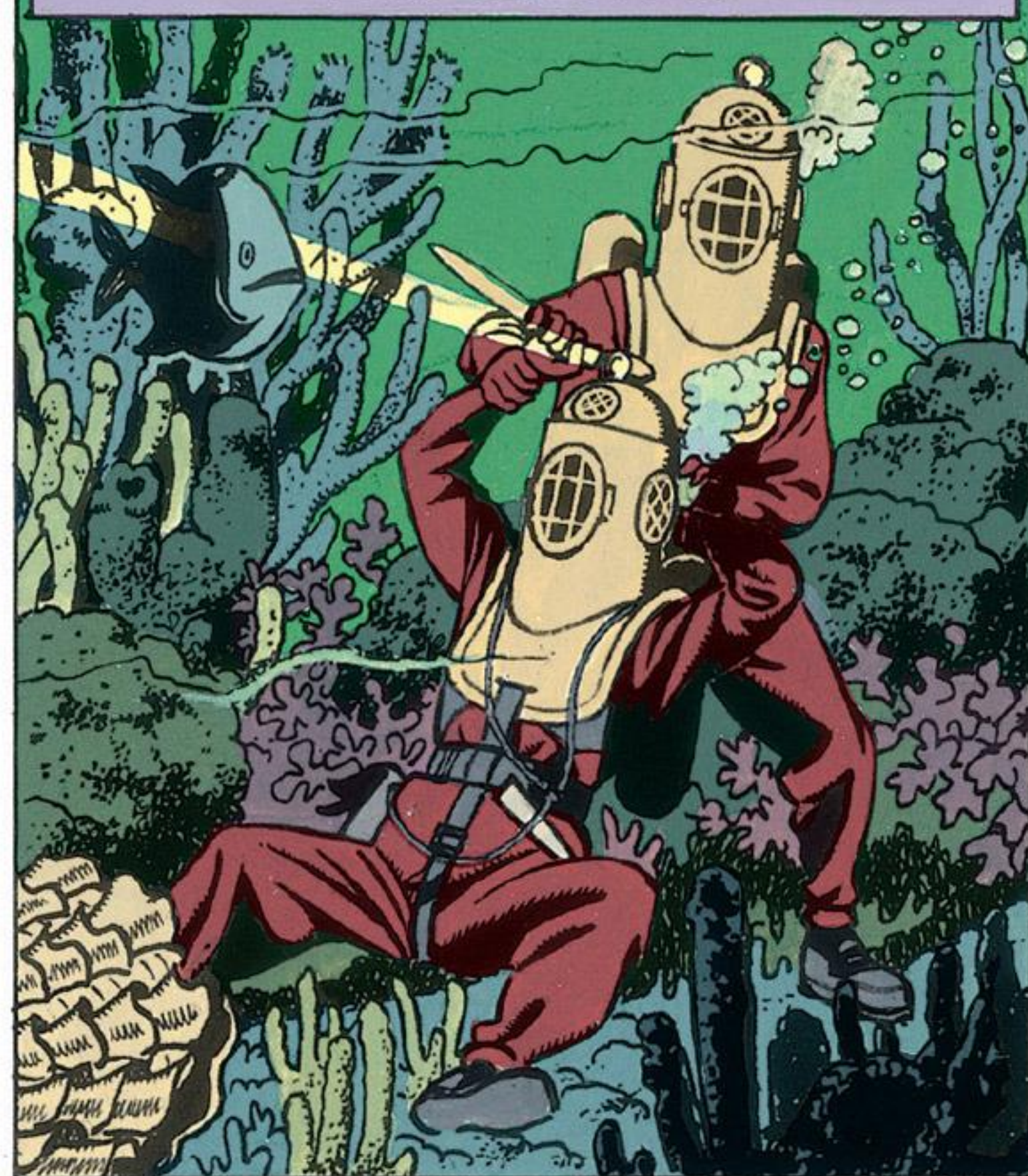


...HE IMMEDIATELY RETRACES HIS STEPS AND WALKS TOWARDS HIS IMMOBILISED OPPONENT, SNEERING...

Ha! Ha! You look somewhat trapped, my dear captain!



...AND, SEIZING THE AIR HOSE, ATTEMPTS TO PULL IT OUT. THE UNFORTUNATE BLAKE, HIS LEG CRUSHED BY THE BIVALVE, DESPERATELY ATTEMPTS TO FEND HIM OFF...



HAMPERED BY HIS ENEMY'S RESISTANCE, OLRİK NONETHELESS SUCCEEDS IN BENDING THE AIR INTAKE OF THE BREATHING APPARATUS, AND BLAKE ALREADY BEGINS TO WEAKEN. BUT THE ROGUE SUDDENLY BREAKS OFF HIS SINISTER WORK... SEVERAL LIGHTS HAVE APPEARED NEARBY...

Curses! They're coming!... I must run...

INDEED, MORTIMER AND HIS MEN, ADVANCING TOWARDS THE COAST, HAVE JUST SEEN THE BEAMS OF THE HEADLAMPS.

There!

ABANDONING HIS SUFFOCATING VICTIM, OLRİK SMASHES BLAKE'S LAMP, TURNS OFF HIS OWN AND WITHOUT LINGERING ANY LONGER TAKES FLIGHT...

BUT THE RESCUERS HAVE RUSHED FORWARD, 'AQUATIC GUNS' IN HAND, SPRINTING THROUGH THE OBSTACLES STREWN ALONG THEIR PATH...

...THEY ARRIVE AT THE SCENE OF THE TRAGEDY, WHERE BLAKE LIES UNCONSCIOUS...

Lord!!!

IMMEDIATELY COMING TO THE POOR FELLOW'S HELP, THE DIVERS SOON HAVE HIS LEG FREE AND HIS BREATHING APPARATUS REPAIRED. REALISING THE FUTILITY OF A HAZARDOUS CHASE...

...MORTIMER ORDERS THE GROUP TO RETURN TO THE BASE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE...

We shall meet again!...

WHILE THESE DRAMATIC EVENTS UNFOLD, 60 FATHOMS BELOW THE SURFACE, NEARBY ON THE COAST, A MAN IS TRAVELLING AT HIS MOUNT'S SLOW PACE. IT'S OUR OLD ACQUAINTANCE THE BEZENDJAS, ON A SURVEILLANCE MISSION.

Ah! A fisherman's hut!...

Salaam be with you, fisherman... Can you give me hospitality for the night?

You are welcome in my humble home, Bezendjas.

AS NIGHT FALLS, THE TWO MEN SHARE A HOOKAH AND CHAT AROUND THE FIRE...

So, are you happy with the life you live in this isolated place?

Fish is plentiful and the area quiet. And yet the new moon will no longer find me here...

Oh? And why is that? Does the noise from the patrol aircraft frighten you so much?...

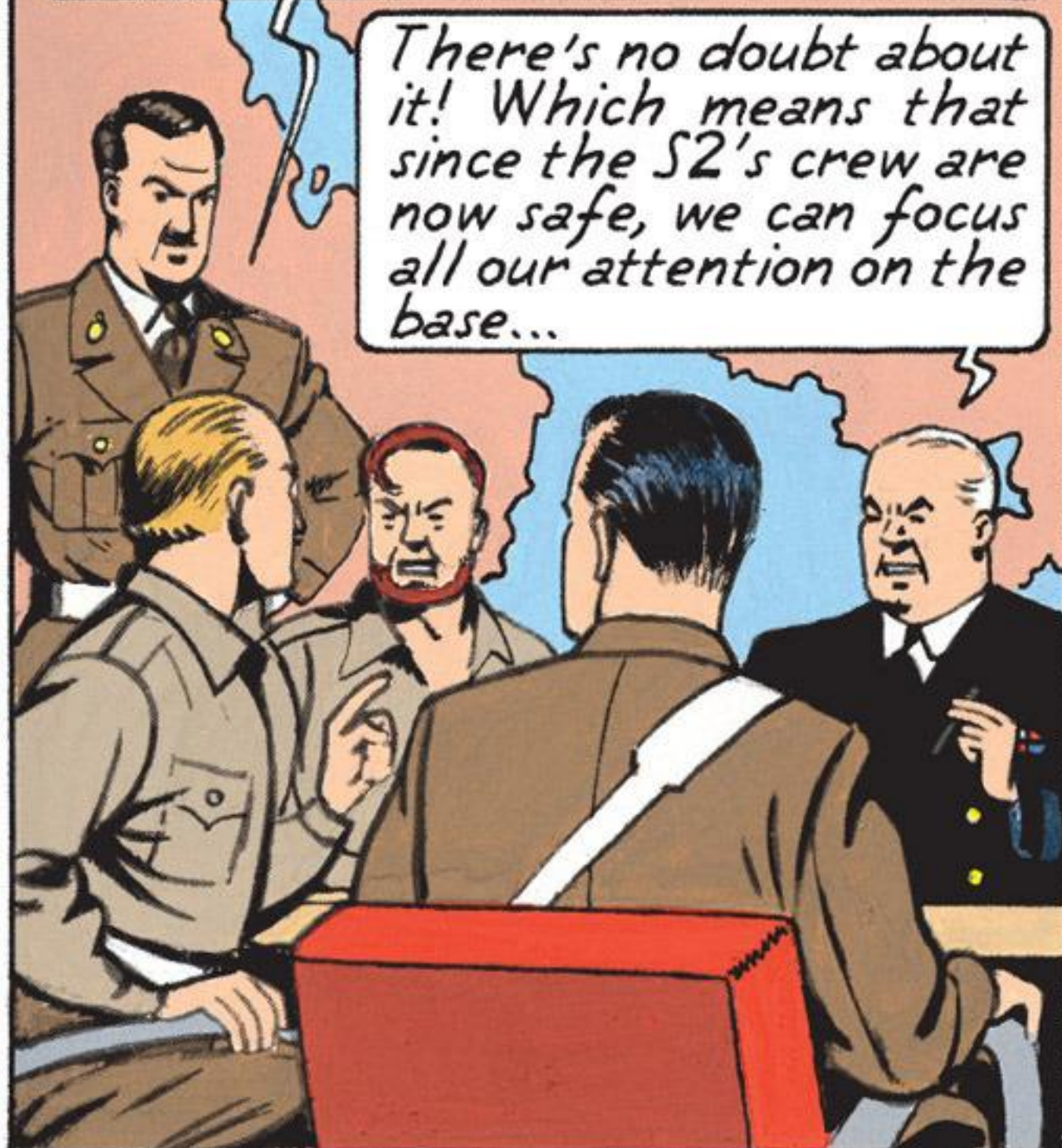
No, I'm leaving because these waters are haunted... Sometimes you can see strange lights in the sea...

...This very afternoon, there were terrifying rumbles coming from the depths. The earth shook and over there, around that solitary rock, I saw the waters bubble and froth...

Well, well...

IN THE MEANTIME, BLAKE WAS BROUGHT BACK TO THE BASE AND RECEIVED INTENSIVE CARE FROM THE MEDICAL OFFICER. REVIVED, HE NOW TAKES PART IN THE GENERAL STAFF MEETING PRESIDED OVER BY SIR WILLIAM...

...It's quite obvious that Olrik is going to bring the Imperials back here - in force...



There's no doubt about it! Which means that since the S2's crew are now safe, we can focus all our attention on the base...

...Let's examine our strategic situation first. To the east, the Gulf of Oman. To the west, the Persian Gulf... But the loss of our last submarine rules out all attempts at even partial evacuation on those sides... To the south, well, for one thing the coast is closely guarded, and then there's the ad-Dahna ... 800 miles across red sand desert! An impassable obstacle in the current circumstances! Finally, to the north, the Strait of Hormuz and Makran. But we can forget about using the tunnel too. Olrik knows where the entrance is and his first order of business will be to set up an ambush there. Therefore, gentlemen, there's only one alternative: we put all our defences on full alert immediately. The question will be whether we'll be able to count on support from the Swordfishes!... Thank heavens that cursed spy didn't reach the workshops...

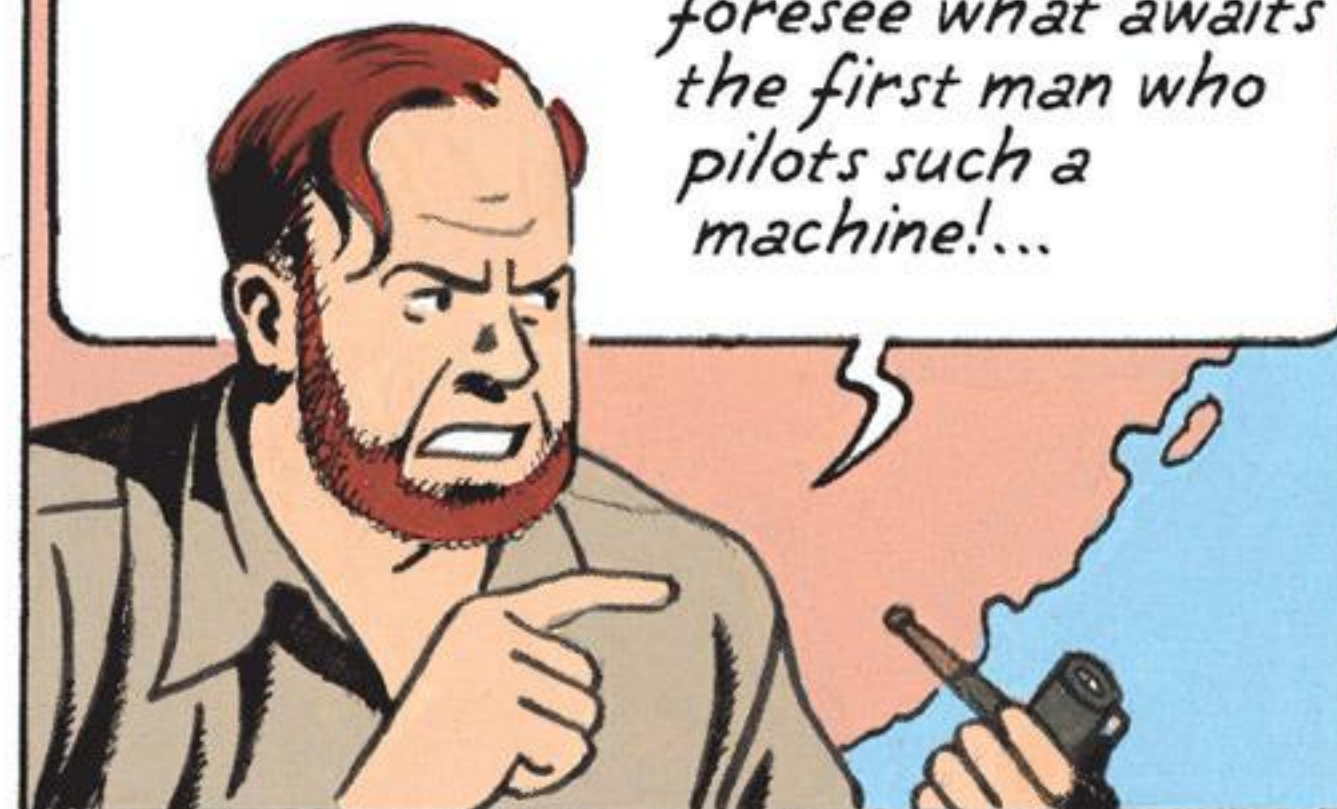


No, but he still managed to reduce our power to a quarter of its maximum output!...

So?...

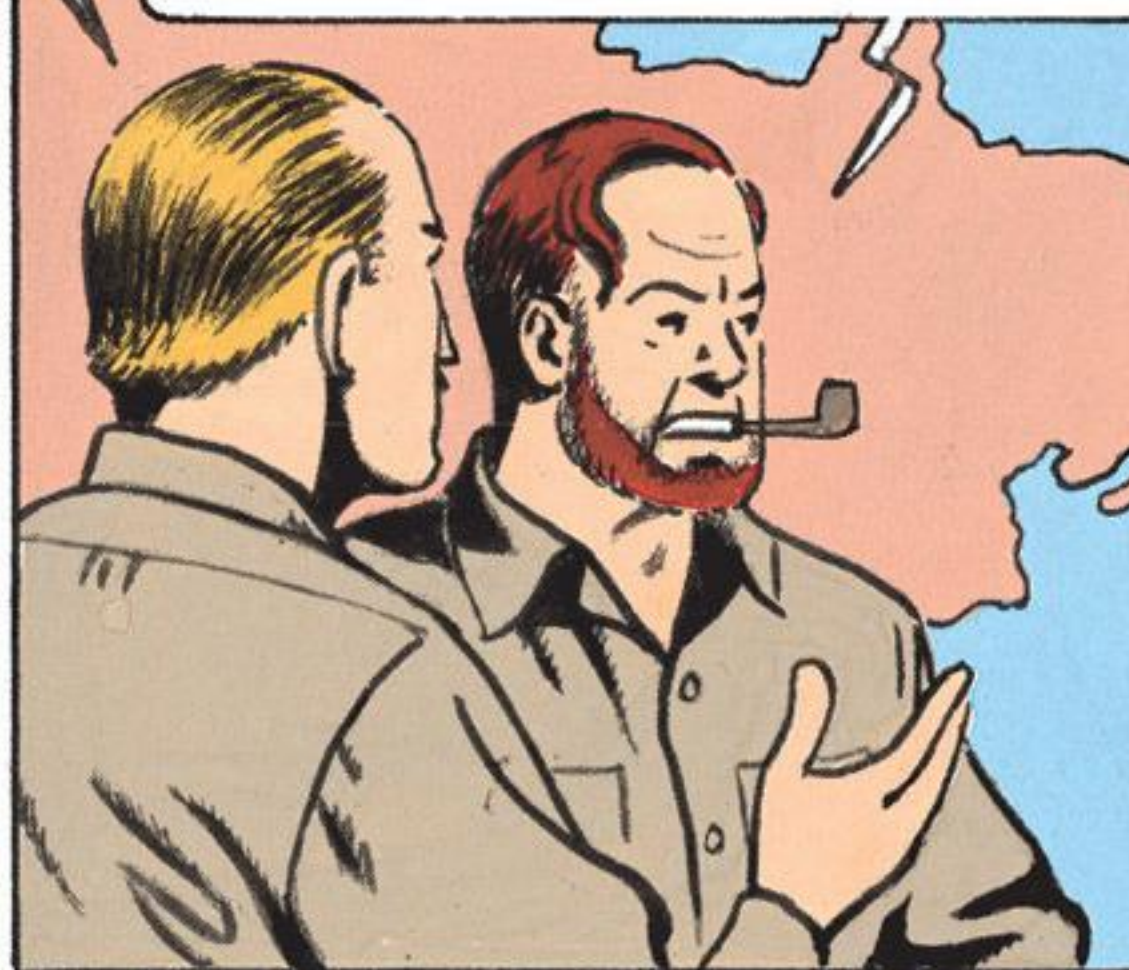


As you know, the Swordfish was designed to be equipped with a robotic pilot. A whole squadron is already on the assembly line ready to receive that device. Unfortunately, its final development - slow, painstaking work - is far from being done. So here's what I propose: we replace the remote-control equipment with a conventional cockpit and turn all our efforts towards completing the first two Swordfishes. They will have the dangerous task of meeting and blunting the enemy attack. In the meantime, we will finish the other aircraft and throw them into the fray as they are completed. However, I must warn you that this is terribly risky and that it is impossible to foresee what awaits the first man who pilots such a machine!...

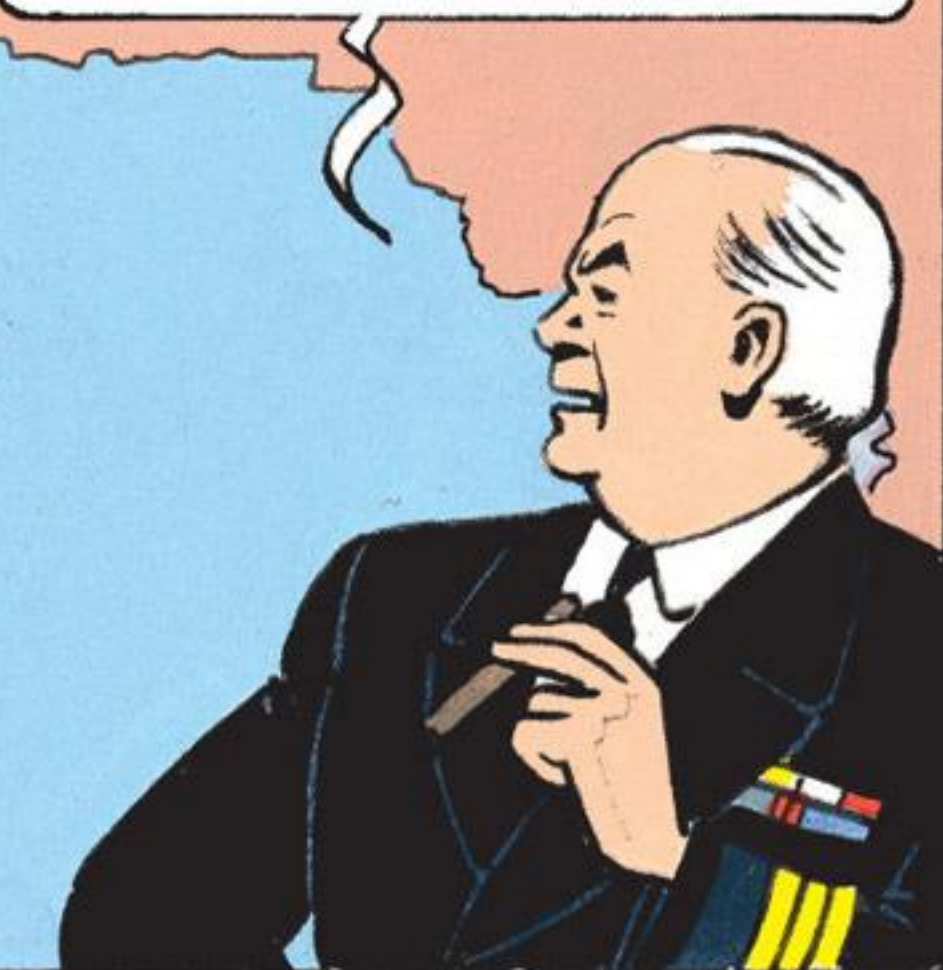


It's a risk we'll have to take, as we have no choice... Sir, I'm ready to fly the first Swordfish.

And I the second one.



Jolly good, gentlemen! I expected no less from you... And how long do you estimate you'll need to get the first aircraft in fighting order?



Barring the unexpected, a minimum of 30 hours... assuming we hold that long!

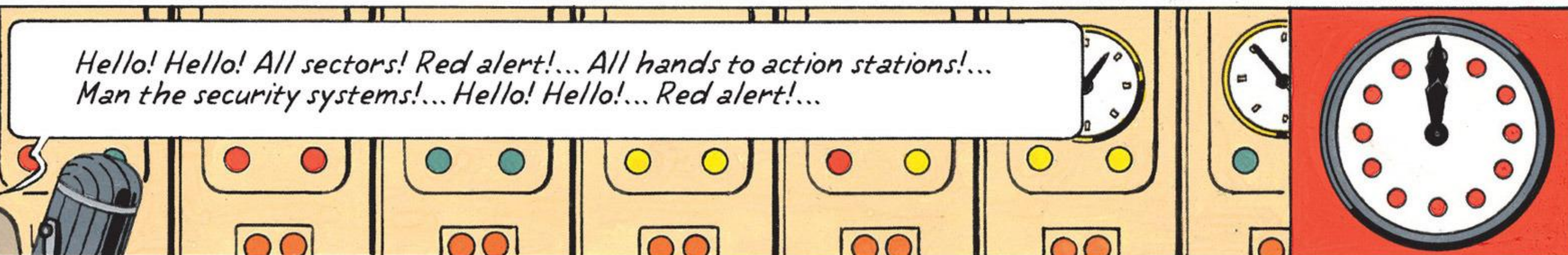


We'll hold!... It is now midnight. The day after tomorrow, at 6.00 a.m., the first two Swordfishes will go into action. It will be the end or the beginning!... Get to work, Professor, and good luck! Blake, you get the base to action stations... Gentlemen, the world's freedom depends on us!

You can count on us, sir!



Hello! Hello! All sectors! Red alert!... All hands to action stations!... Man the security systems!... Hello! Hello!... Red alert!...



AS THAT IMPORTANT CONFERENCE DRAWS TO A CLOSE THE BEZENDJAS, INTRIGUED BY THE PERPLEXING WORDS OF THE FISHERMAN, CONVINCES THE LOCAL TO ACCOMPANY HIM TO THE SHORE.



So that's the rock, eh?...

BUT SUDDENLY OVER THE CRASH OF THE WAVES COMES A LONG MOAN, RISING THEN FALLING ABRUPTLY.



May Allah protect us! A ghost!!!

Quiet, you old fool!... That was someone calling out...

ABANDONING HIS FEARFUL COMPANION, THE BEZENDJAS, LEAPING FROM ROCK TO ROCK, HURRIES TOWARDS THE SPOT WHERE THE MOAN CAME FROM.



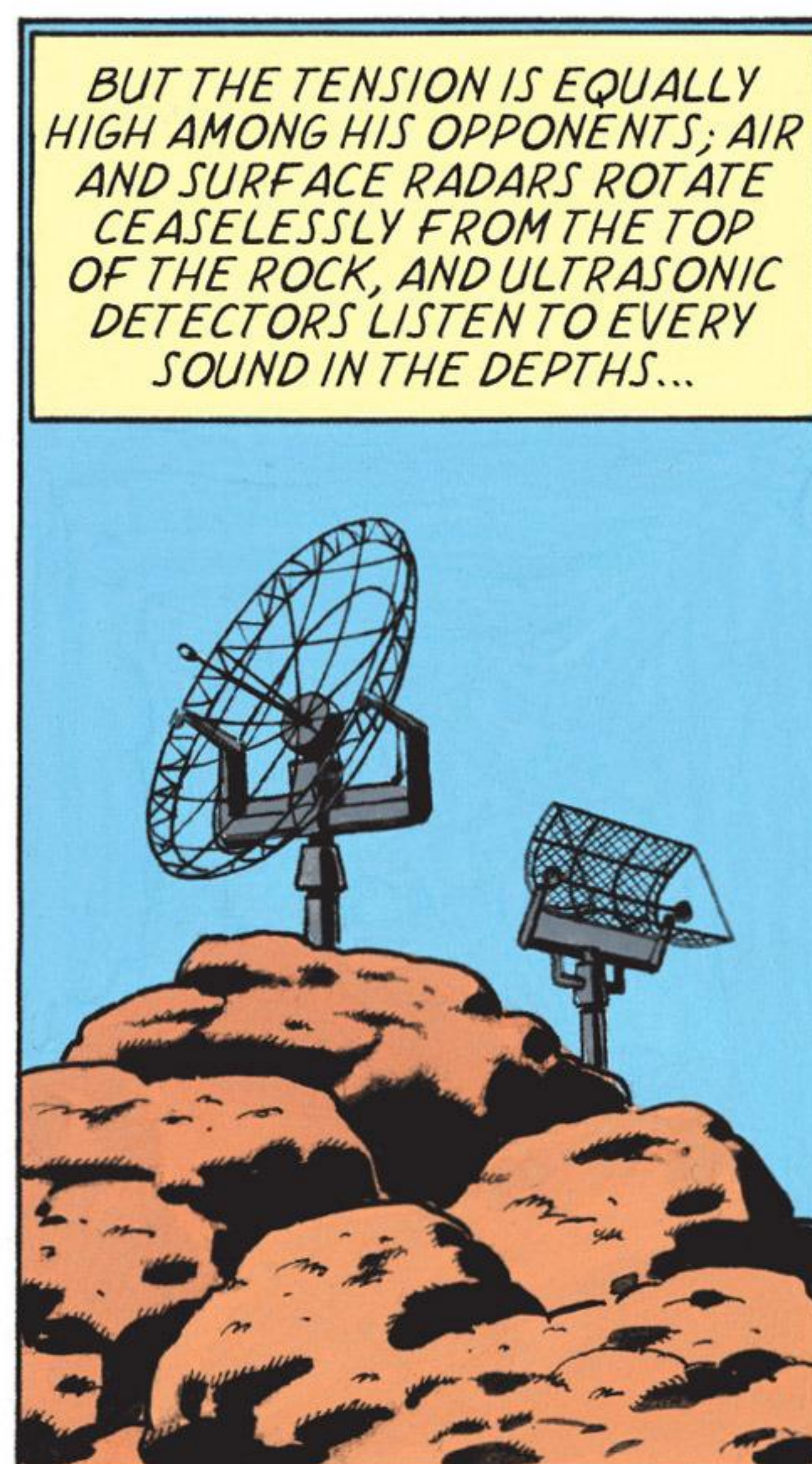
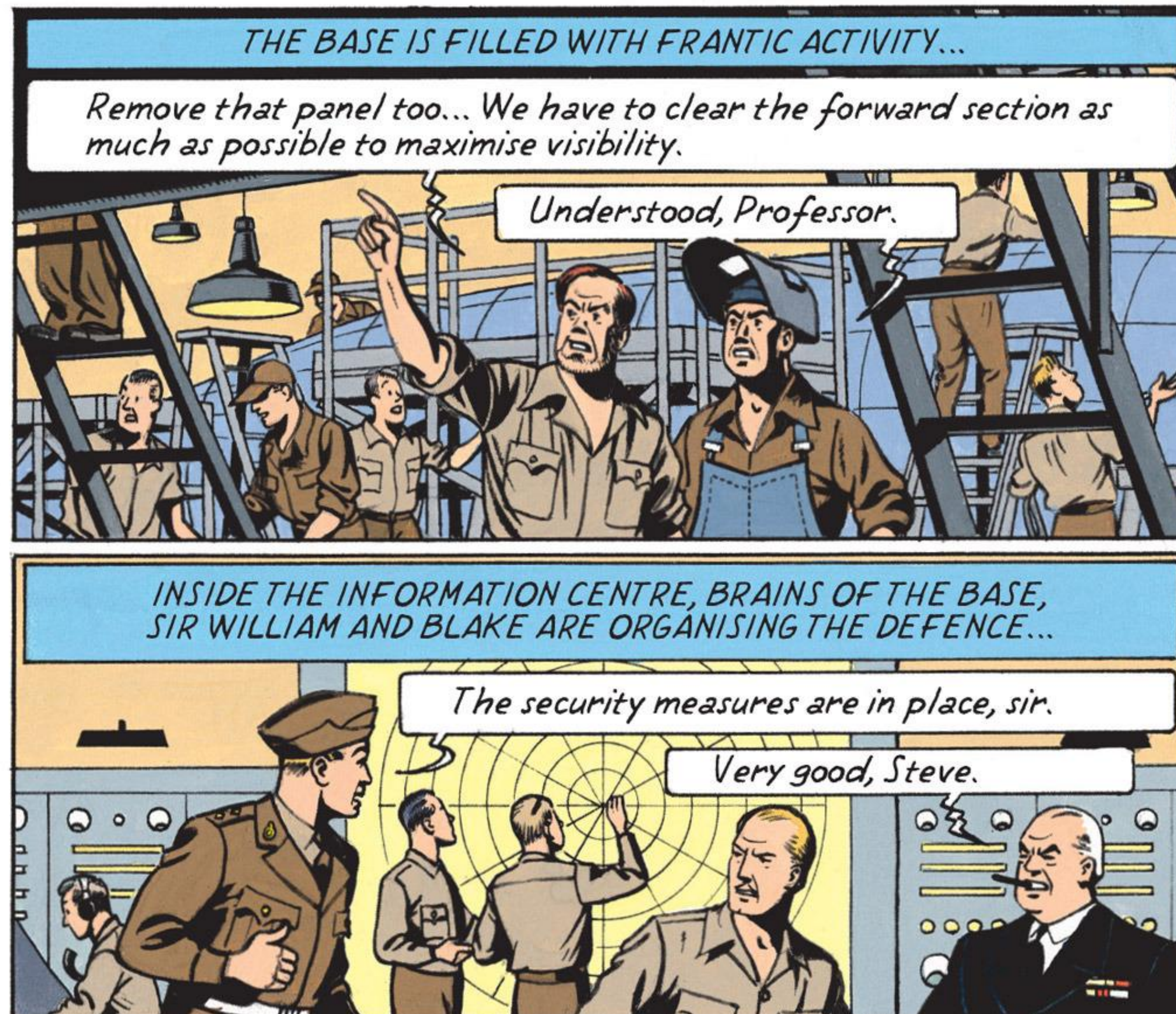
A diver!...

Beware!

THE BEZENDJAS LEANS OVER THE MAN AND IS ASTONISHED TO RECOGNISE, THROUGH THE HELMET'S SMASHED PORTHOLE, THE MOONLIT FACE OF HIS MASTER, COLONEL OLRİK...



The colone!!!!



NEWS OF THE APPROACH OF ENEMY SQUADRONS HAS BARELY REACHED THE INFORMATION CENTRE BEFORE OTHER MESSAGES FOLLOW IN QUICK AND OMINOUS SUCCESSION FROM THE OTHER WATCH POSTS...

Hello! Hello! This is surface watch. Contacts detected at 50 miles south, south-east. Probably three large ships and ten destroyers. Another contact comprising a heavy unit and five smaller vessels 43 miles to the west, south-west.

They must be coming from Muscat...

And the others from Bahrain...

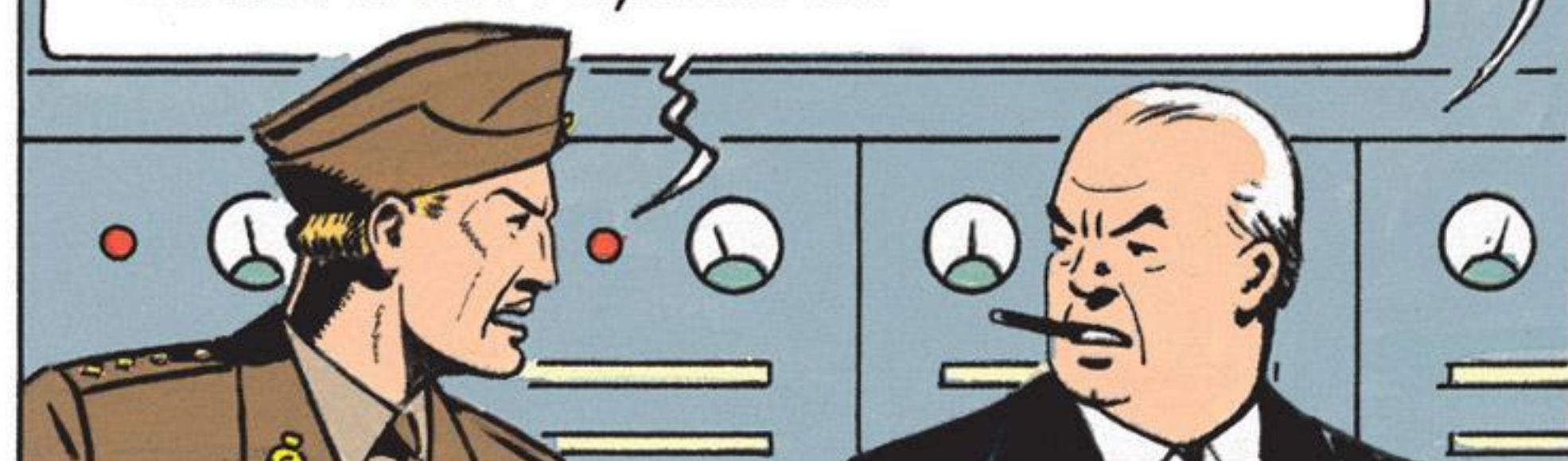


Hello! Hello! This is underwater watch. ASDIC reports a dozen submarines at least 34 miles to the south-east, and 3 or 4 west, north-west, at 39 miles.

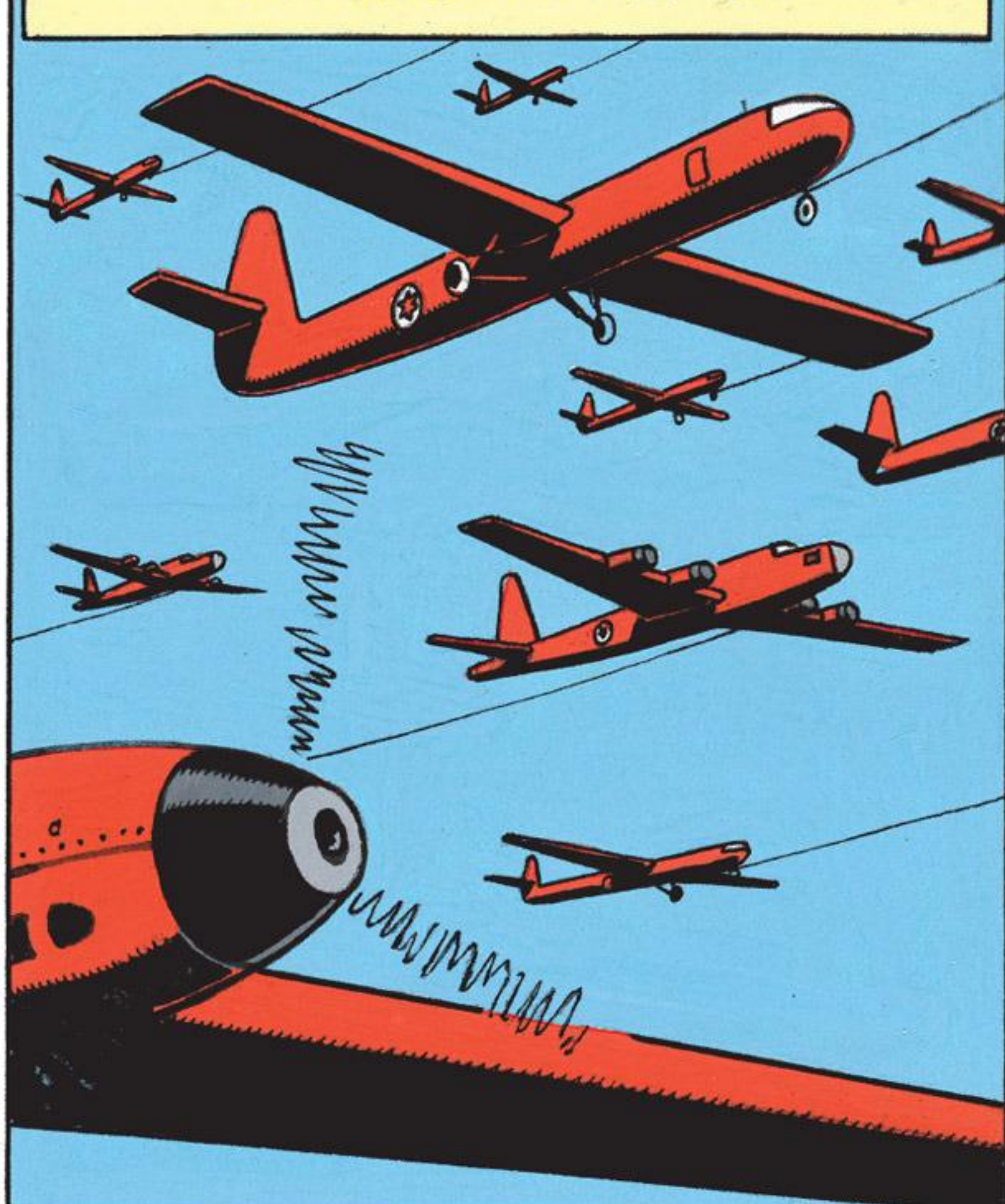
Hello! Hello! This is aerial watch. Large formation 35 miles to the east, south-east... It seems to be splitting into 2 groups... One of them is turning straight to the north, north-west...

To cut us off from Makran, of course!... Well, the situation is precisely as we'd foreseen...

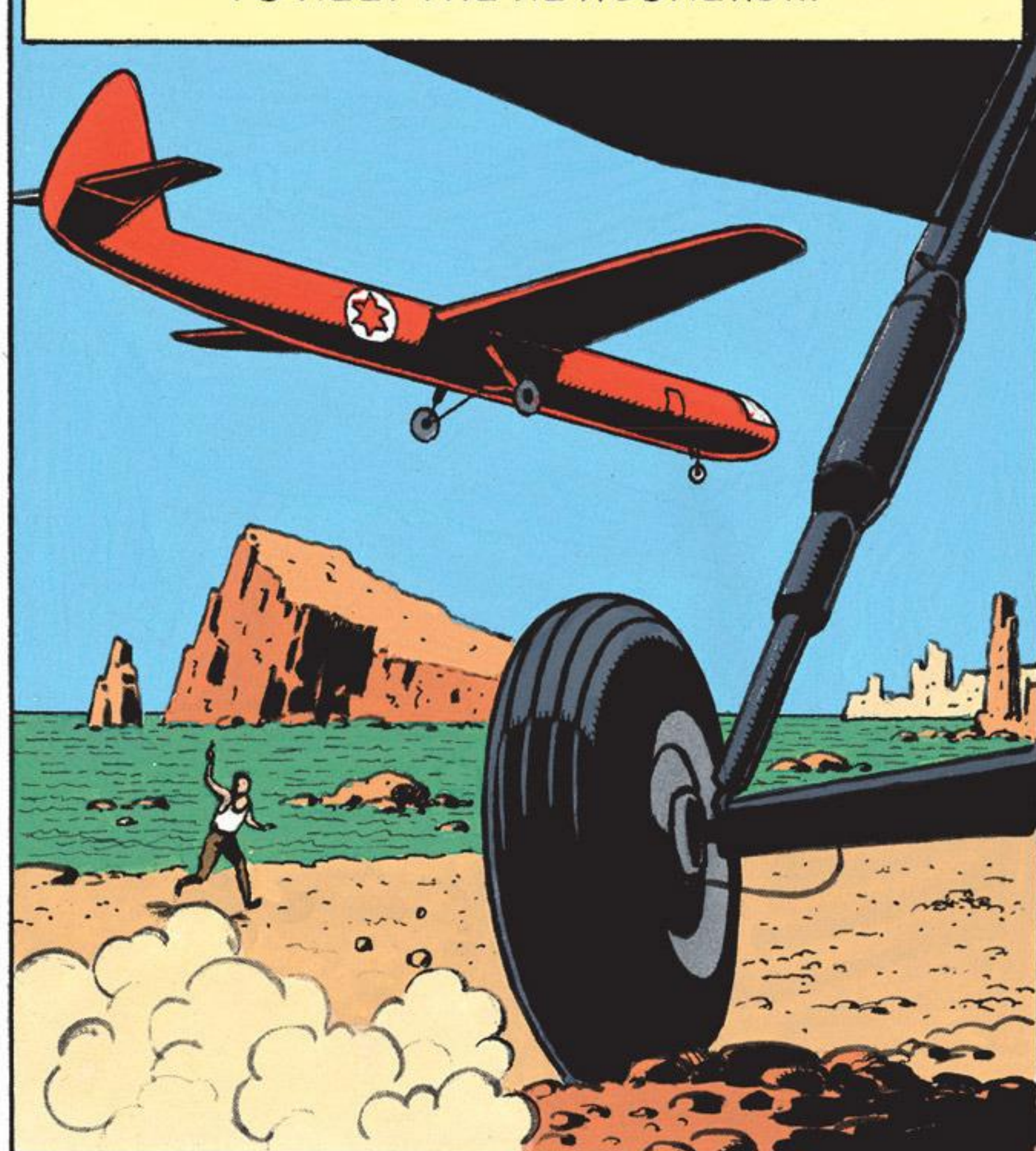
Absolutely, sir... Which is why I'm going to make one last inspection...



INDEED, A FEW MINUTES LATER AN IMPRESSIVE FORMATION OF FOUR-ENGINE AIRCRAFT TOWING TROOP-LADEN GLIDERS APPEARS ON THE HORIZON.



THE GLIDERS LAND ON THE BEACH ONE AFTER THE OTHER... OLRİK, WHO HAS RUSHED TO MEET THE NEWCOMERS...



...IMMEDIATELY MAKES CONTACT WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE AIRBORNE TROOPS.

Colonel, by special order of His Majesty, all available units have been sent to you and placed under your direct command...

I am deeply honoured, General, and, believe me, the Emperor will have no cause to regret the trust he has placed in me... We have them this time!!!



WHILE ON THE SHORE THE AIRBORNE TROOPS RAPIDLY TAKE UP POSITIONS IN FRONT OF THE BASE...



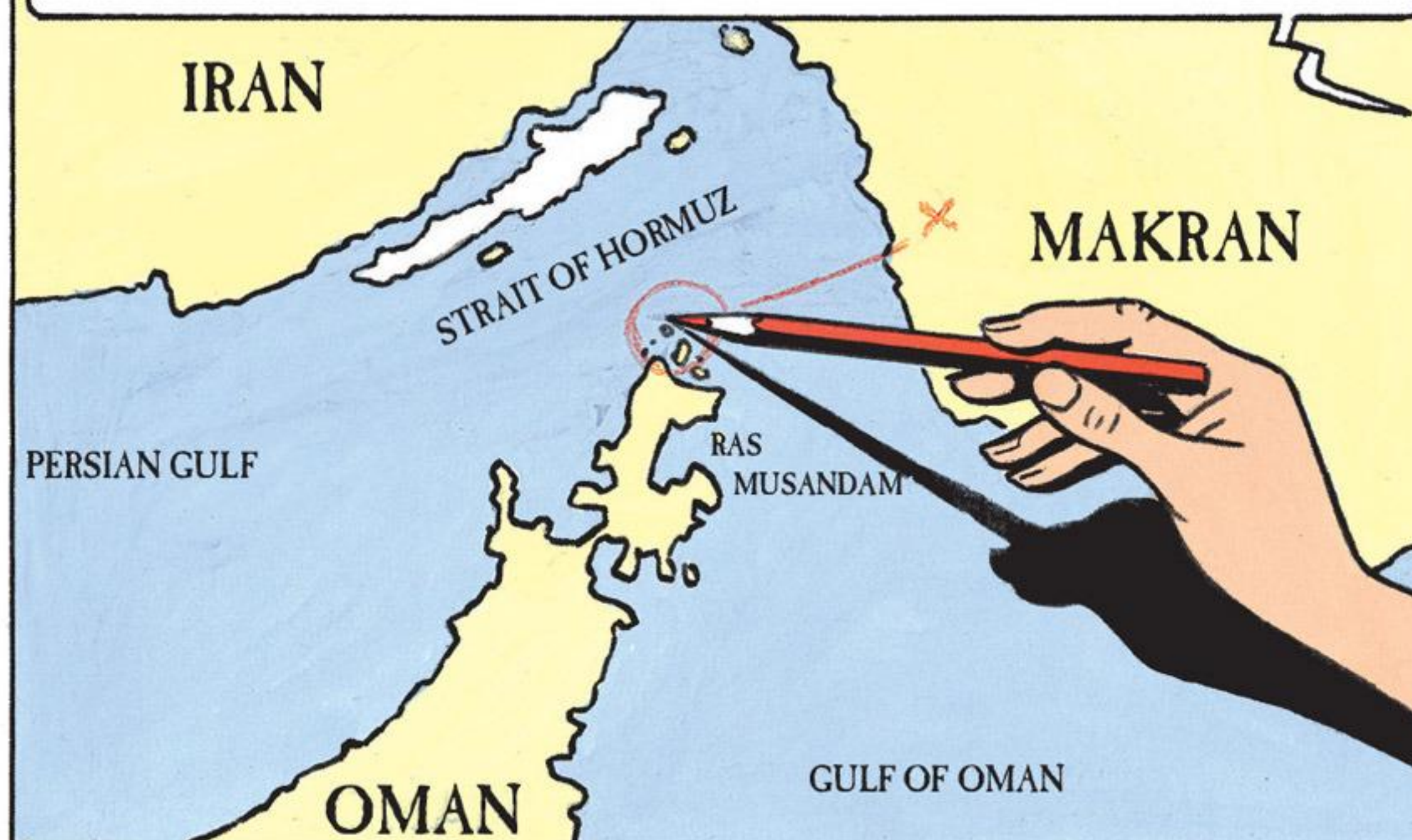
...OLRIK EXPLAINS HIS PLAN OF ATTACK TO THE OFFICERS OF HIS STAFF.

So it's that rock over there that we have to take? Hmm! It won't be easy, I'm afraid!

Certainly, the operation will be costly. But the stakes are high enough to justify the losses. Just think... The lair of the Swordfish!!!



...But look at the map, gentlemen!... Here, at the centre of our deployment, is the base: that isolated rock a good half-mile out to sea... To the south, deployed along the coast, our artillery is pointed at it. On the other side of the strait is the tunnel's exit, currently guarded by our 2nd Airborne Group... Finally, to the east and west, our fleet and carrier-based squadrons... We might as well say that the base is at our mercy. As soon as the navy is in position as per the attack plan, we will spring into action.



But why risk a frontal attack in open terrain instead of waiting for the 2nd Airborne to enter the tunnel?

Because that group will be delayed by tremendous obstacles: quicksands, armoured doors and narrow passages to be blasted open, etc. And because every hour that passes might cost us the fruit of our efforts: the secret of the Swordfish!... And now, gentlemen, please excuse me while I don a uniform worthy of my rank.



TWO HOURS LATER, BLAKE, HAVING COMPLETED HIS LAST-MINUTE INSPECTION, REPORTS TO GOVERNOR SIR WILLIAM GRAY.

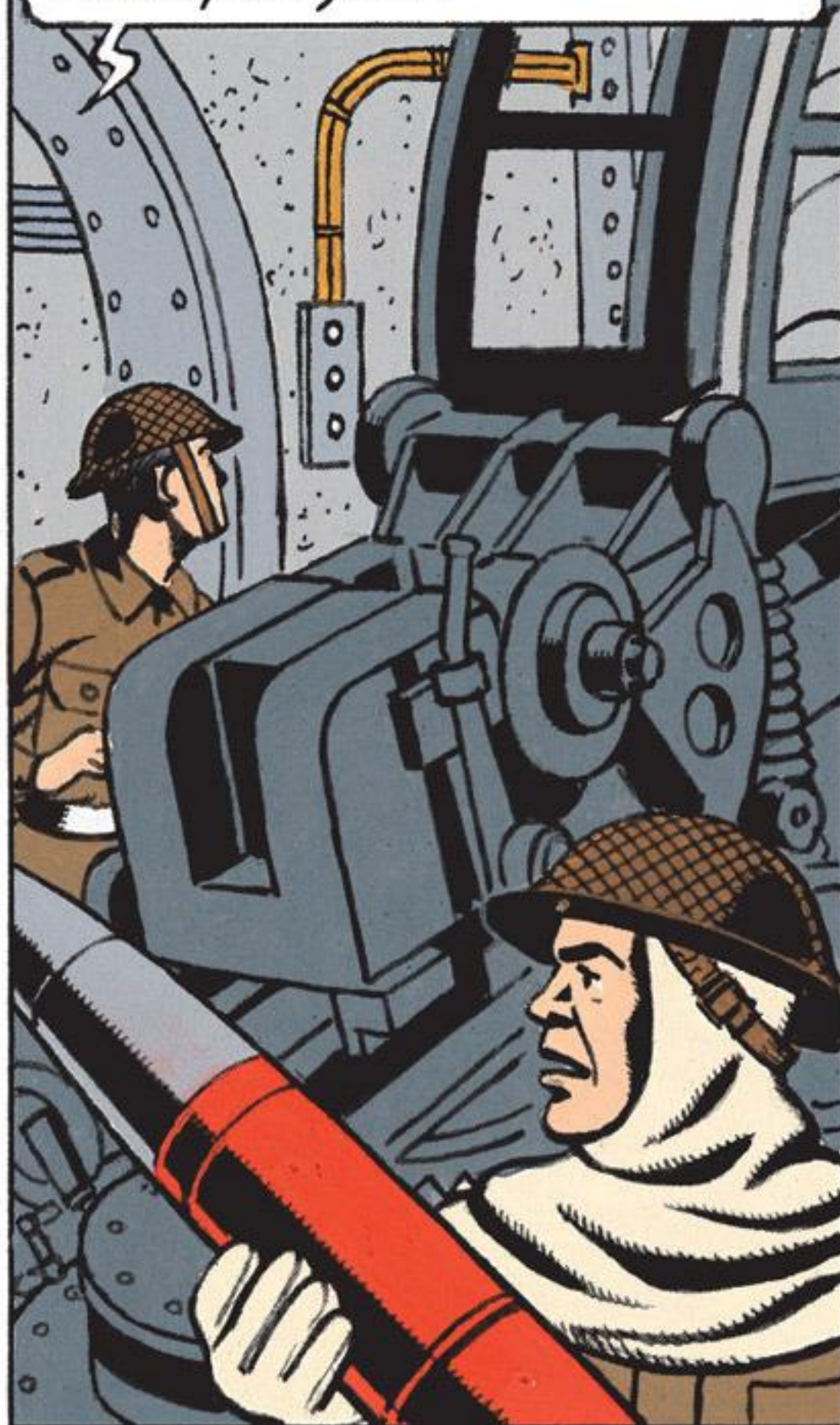
...I checked the entire system and I'm now in the lookout post... Morale is excellent at every level and the men are calm and resolute as they wait for the clash...



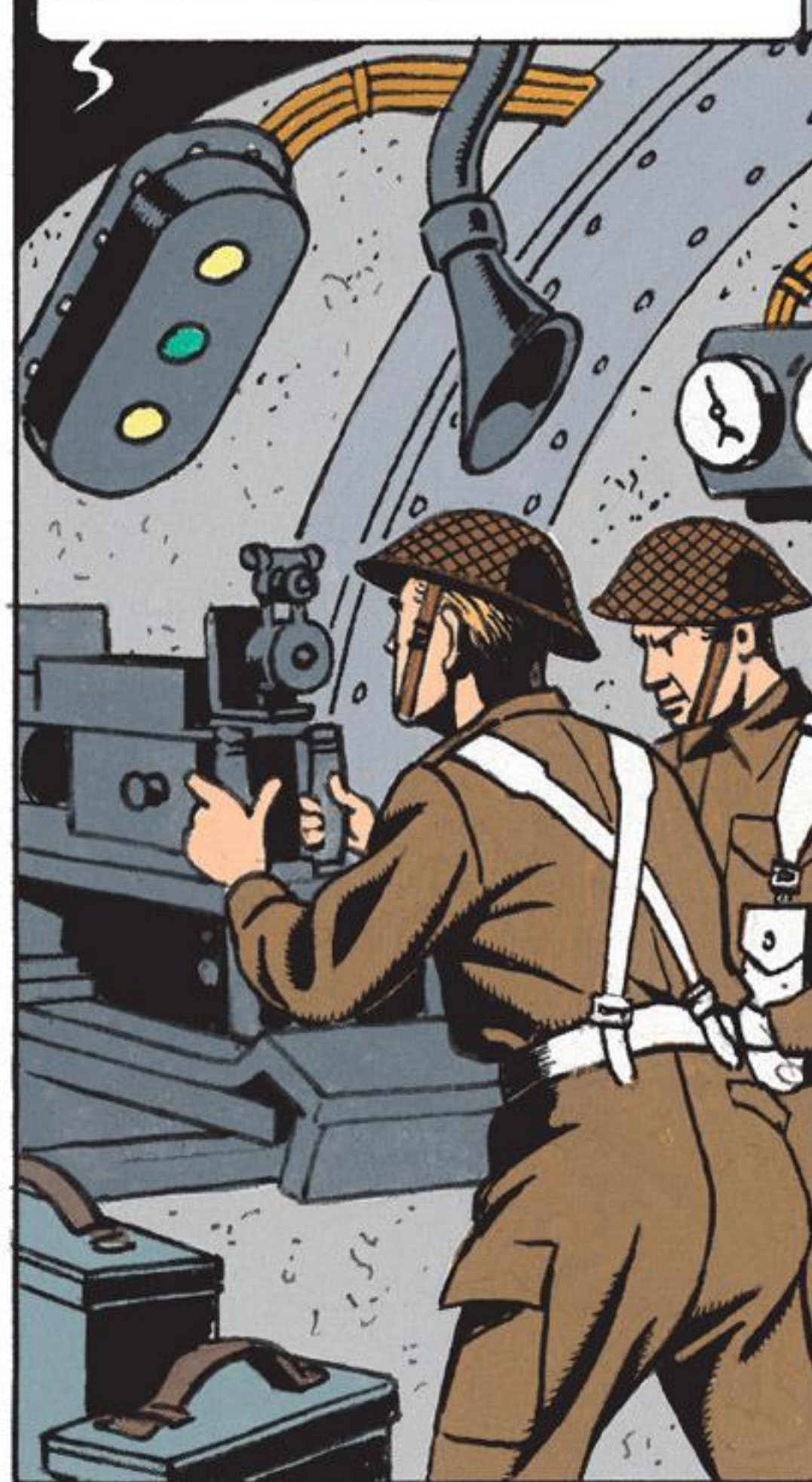
...Down in the magazines, whose stockpiles will let us hold for several weeks, ammunition is ready to be hoisted up...



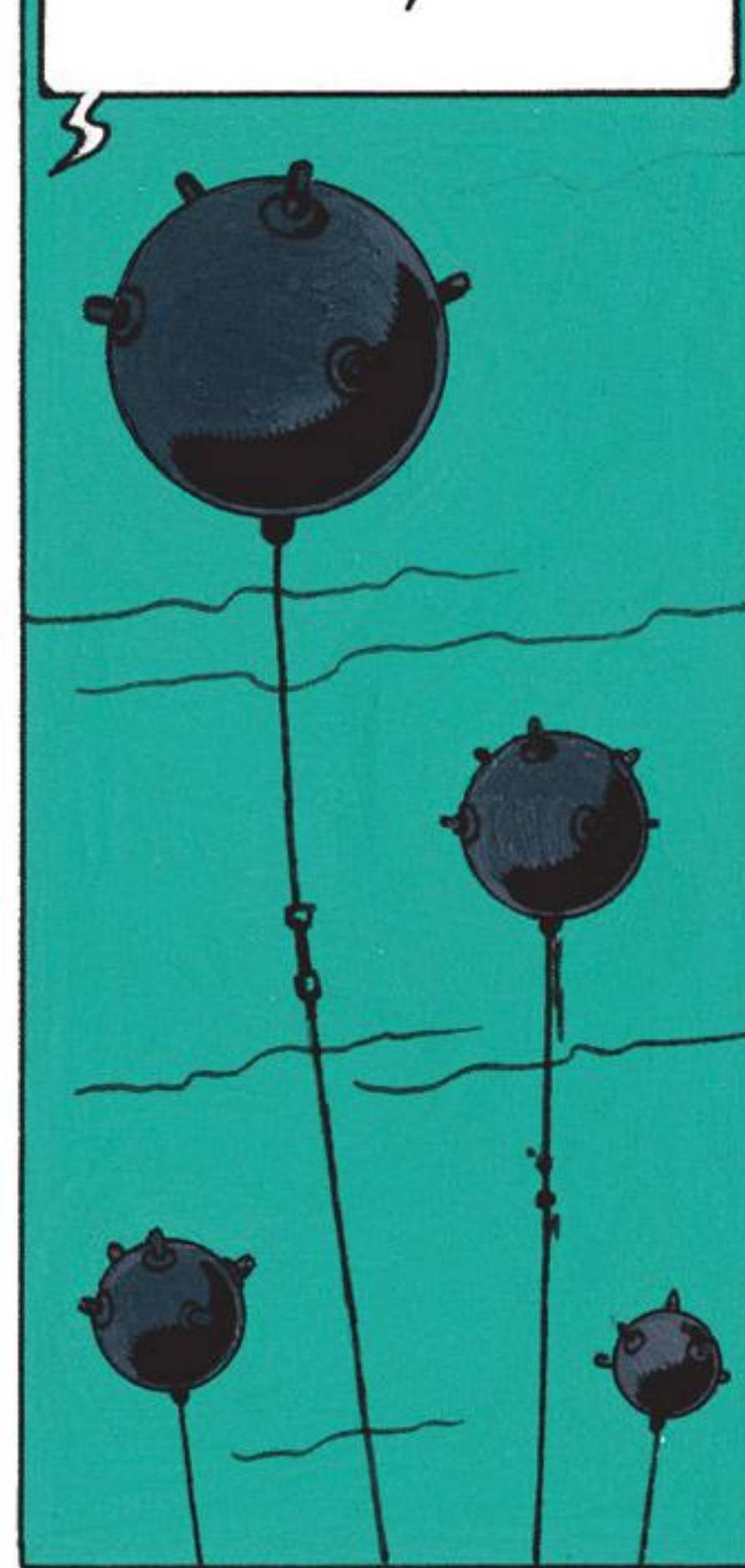
...to the gun emplacements, where the artillery waits only for the word to remove the camouflaged portholes and open fire.



Every embrasure is bristling with machine guns, flame-throwers, bazookas...



...and we don't have to fear an underwater assault, as our minefield is all but impassable.



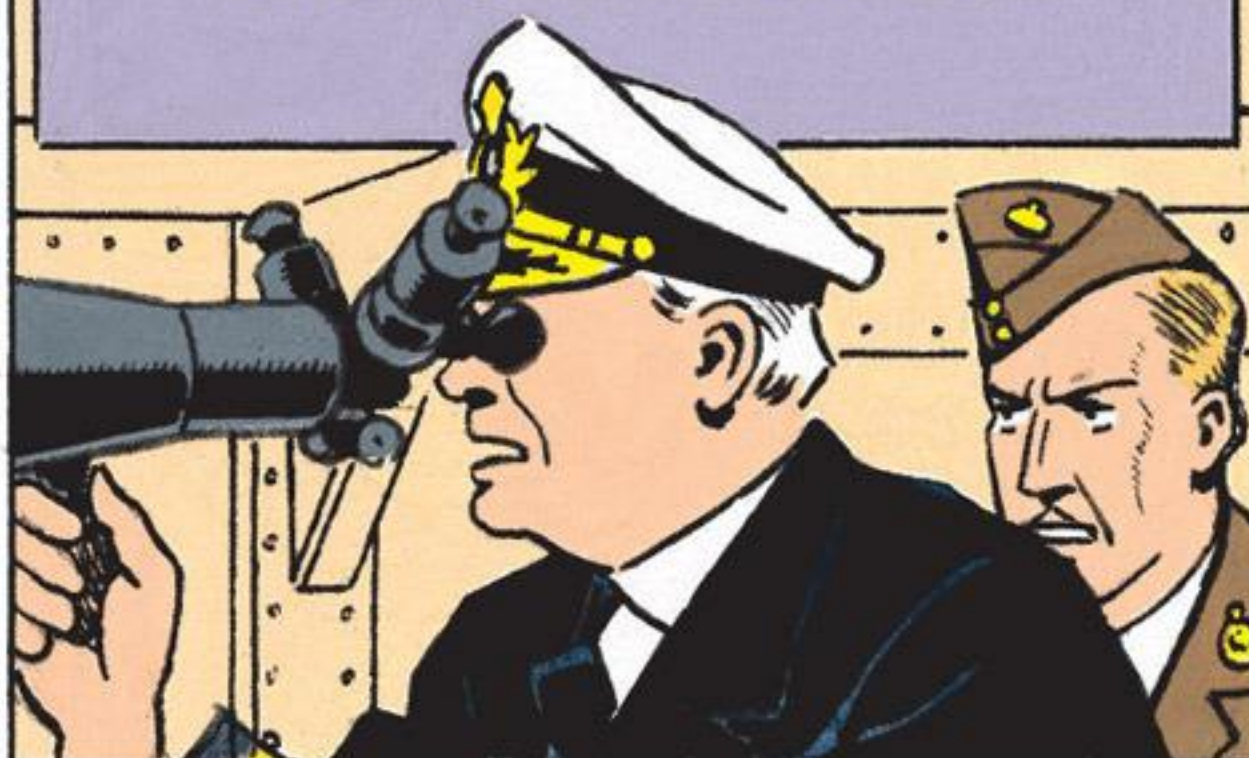
Finally, regarding the Makran sector, the tunnel is fully locked up. The portcullises and doors are closed and plan B is ready to come into play... According to the latest news, the Imperials are crossing the quicksands with heavy...



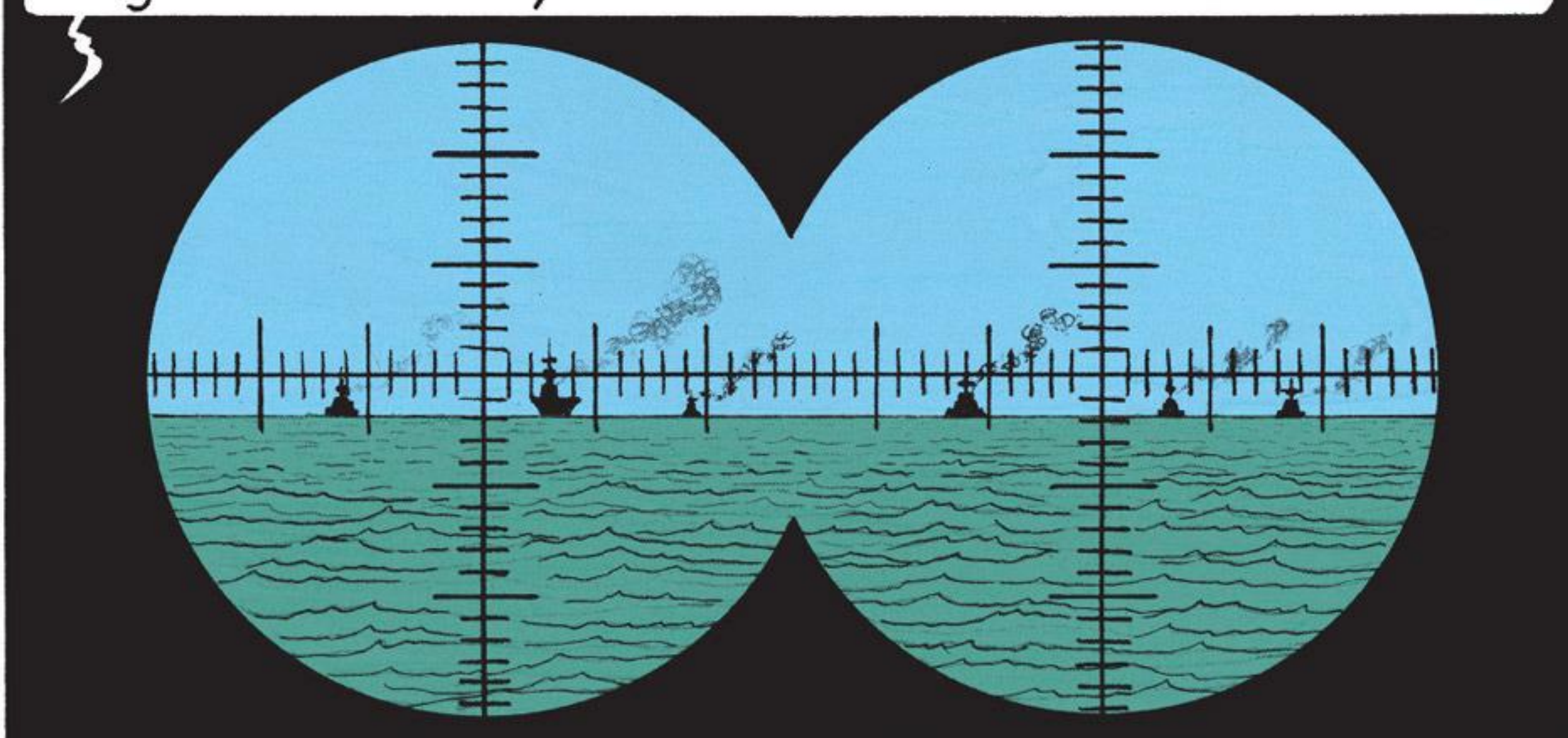
What's that?... The Imperial fleet is in sight?... I'm on my way!...



AND MOMENTS LATER...



That's right... An aircraft carrier... Two cruisers and seven... eight... nine destroyers!



Smoke in sight, bearing 262!!!



And there are the others!... Perfect!

BUT A LOOKOUT'S CRY INTERRUPTS THE COMMUNICATION...

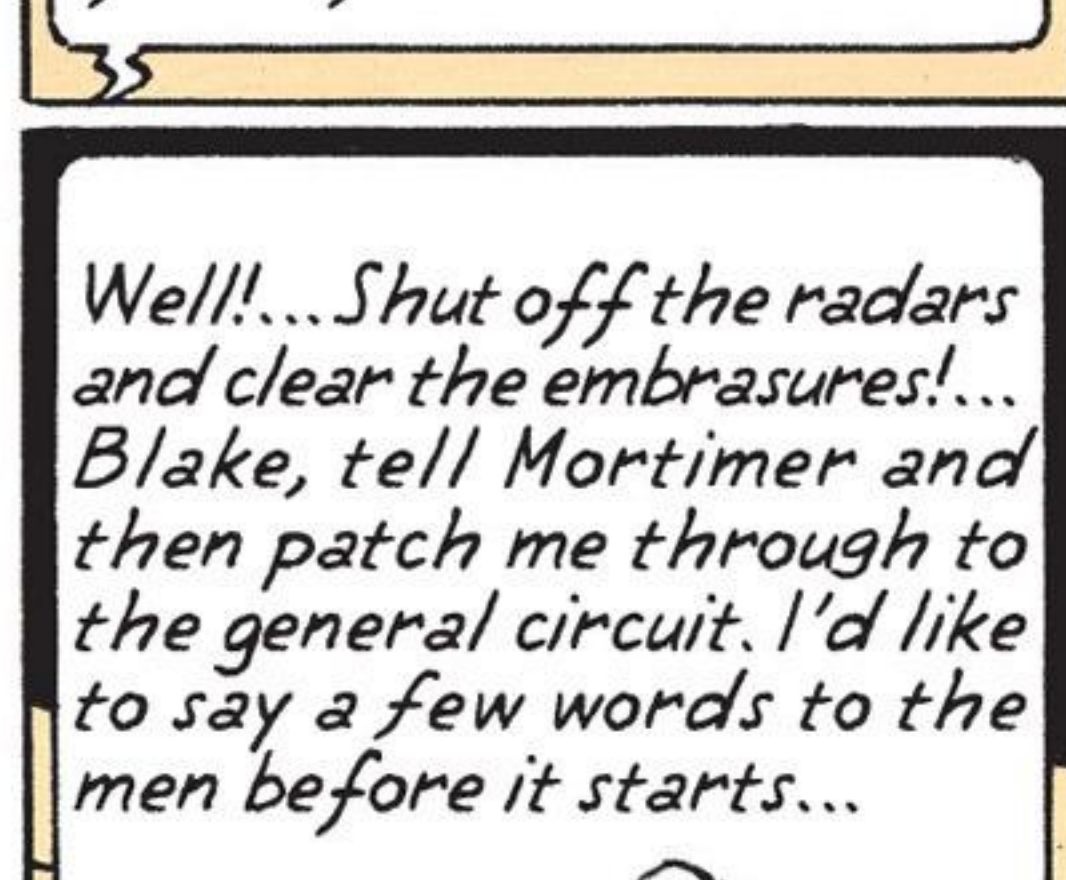


Captain! Smoke! Bearing 98 degrees!

The artillery on the coast seems about to open fire!!!



Hello! Hello! This is the information centre... The Makran watch post reports that the enemy is now in front of door number one!



Well!... Shut off the radars and clear the embrasures!... Blake, tell Mortimer and then patch me through to the general circuit. I'd like to say a few words to the men before it starts...

Yes, sir.



Hello! Mortimer, the party's about to kick off!... We'll do the impossible to hold long enough... As for you, do your best...



All right!... You can count on us, old chap. And in the meantime make them dance!!!



Boys, the time for action has come!... Your comrades in the assembly room are currently finishing...



...the weapon that will enable us to take our revenge and recover our freedom... Professor Mortimer asked for a 30-hour delay... I promised he would have it, knowing that you wouldn't make a liar out of me: 'England expects that every man will do his duty!!!'



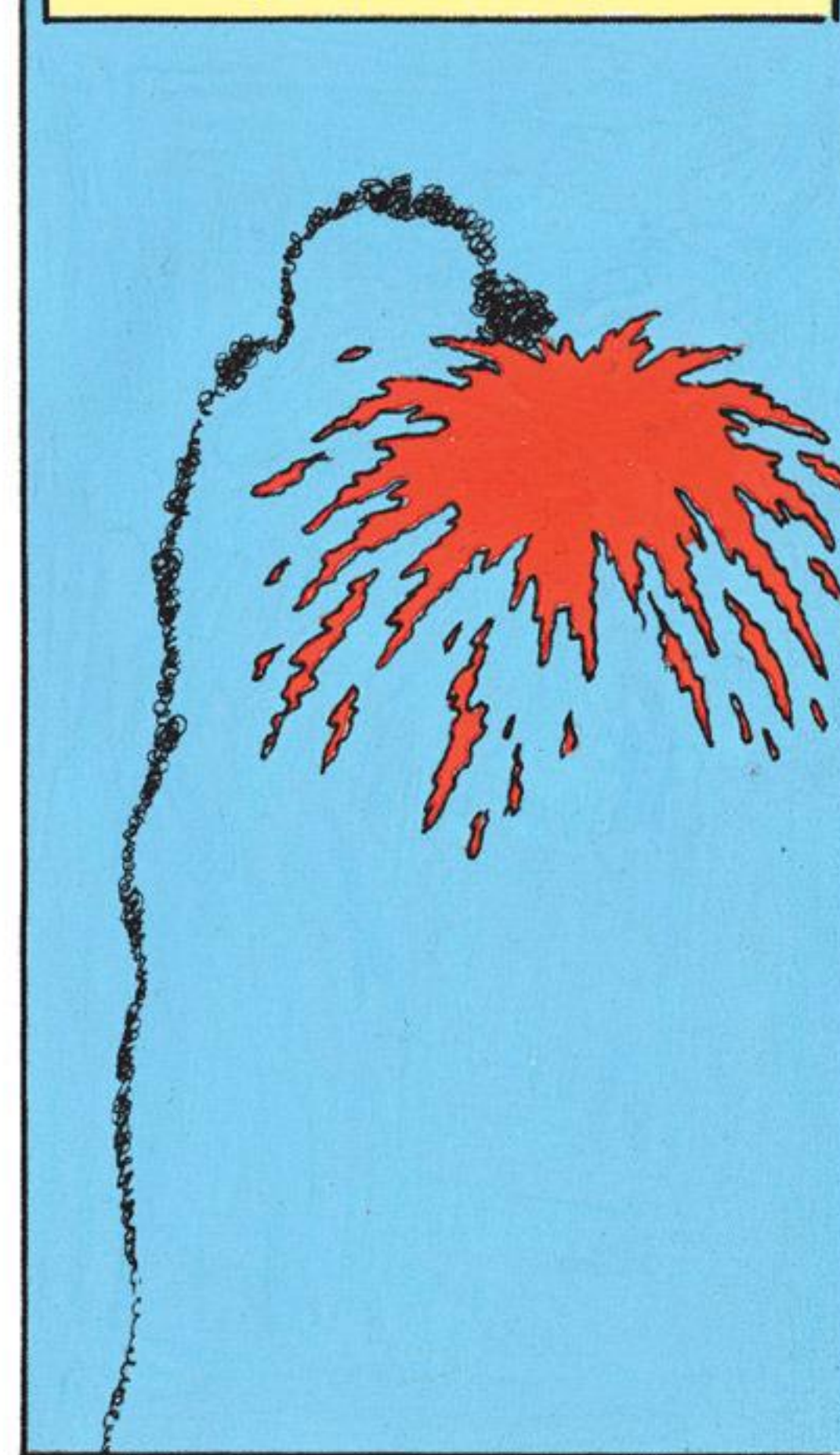
Hurrah!

Hurrah!

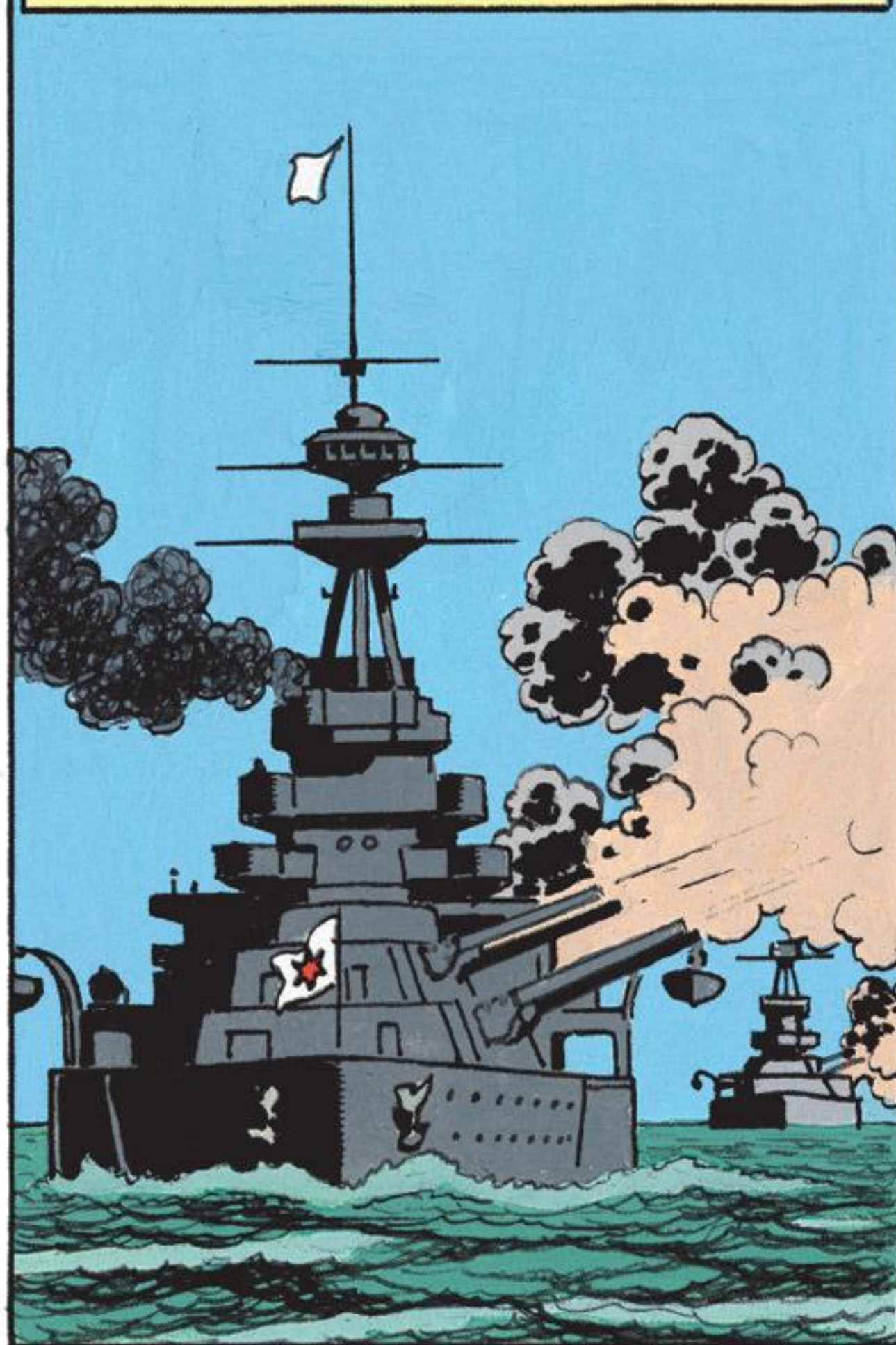
Hurrah!

Hurrah!

AT THAT MOMENT, A RED FLARE, FIRED FROM THE LINES OF THE ATTACKERS, LAUNCHES INTO THE SKY AND BURSTS! THE IMPERIALS ARE ATTACKING!!!



AT THE SIGNAL, THE SHIPS, WHICH HAVE CLOSED TO LESS THAN THREE MILES FROM THEIR TARGET, OPEN FIRE WITH THEIR HEAVY BATTERIES...



...IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY THE GROUND-BASED ARTILLERY, THE MULTIPLE ROCKET-LAUNCHERS DISGORING THEIR DEADLY CARGO.



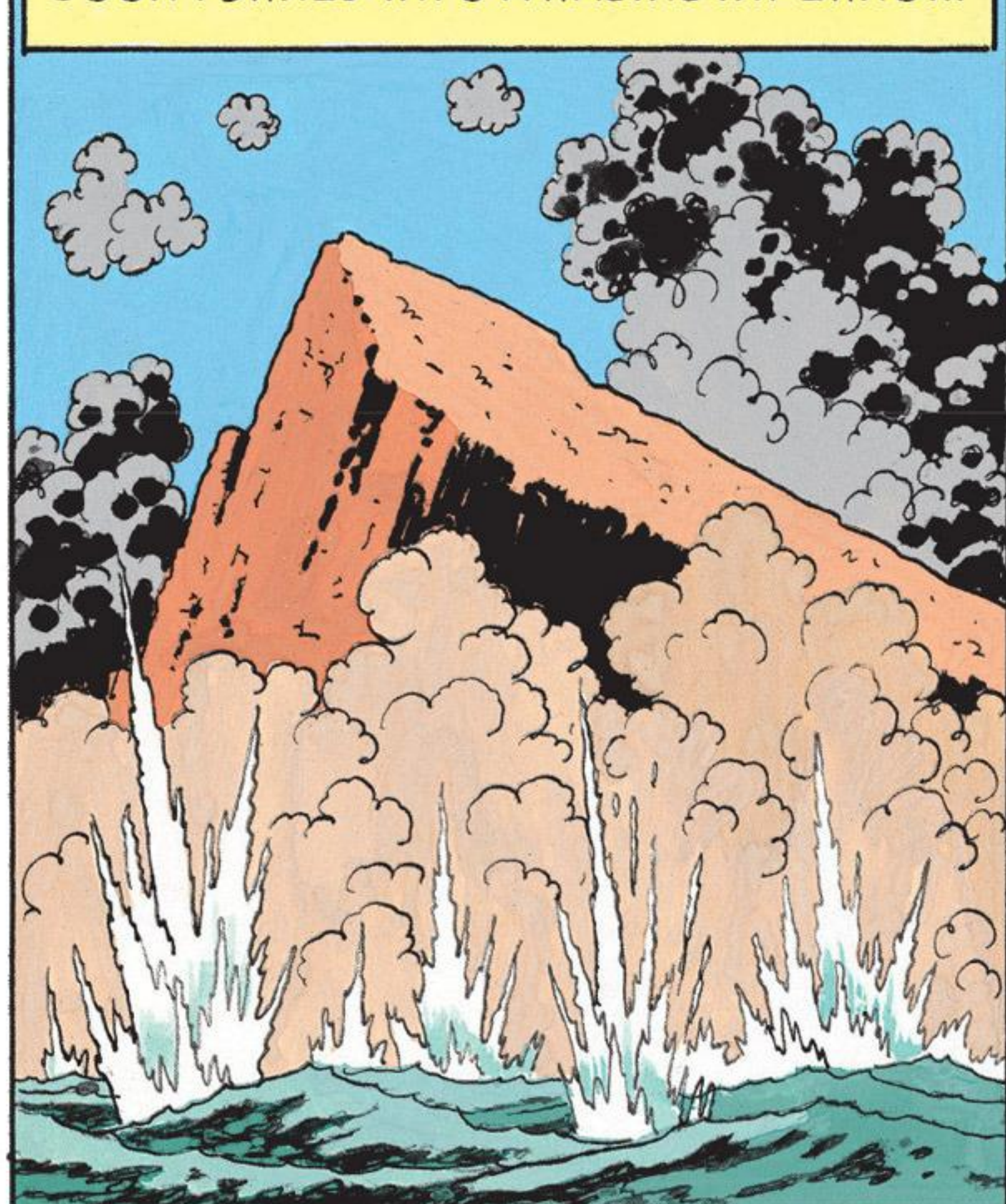
AND WHILE FIGHTERS AND BOMBERS TAKE OFF FROM THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER AND BEAR DOWN AT THE ROCK LIKE A FLOCK OF VULTURES...



...THE SUBMARINES, TORPEDOES AND LIMPET MINES AT THE READY, GLIDE SILENTLY TOWARDS THE BASE'S MAIN GATE...



ASSAILED FROM ALL DIRECTIONS, THE ROCK DISAPPEARS UNDER A HAIL OF BOMBS, ROCKETS AND SHELLS, AND IS SOON TURNED INTO A RAGING INFERNO...



STANDING READY BEHIND THEIR GUNS, THE DEFENDERS WAIT... WHEN SUDDENLY...

Oh heck! Smoke shells!!!

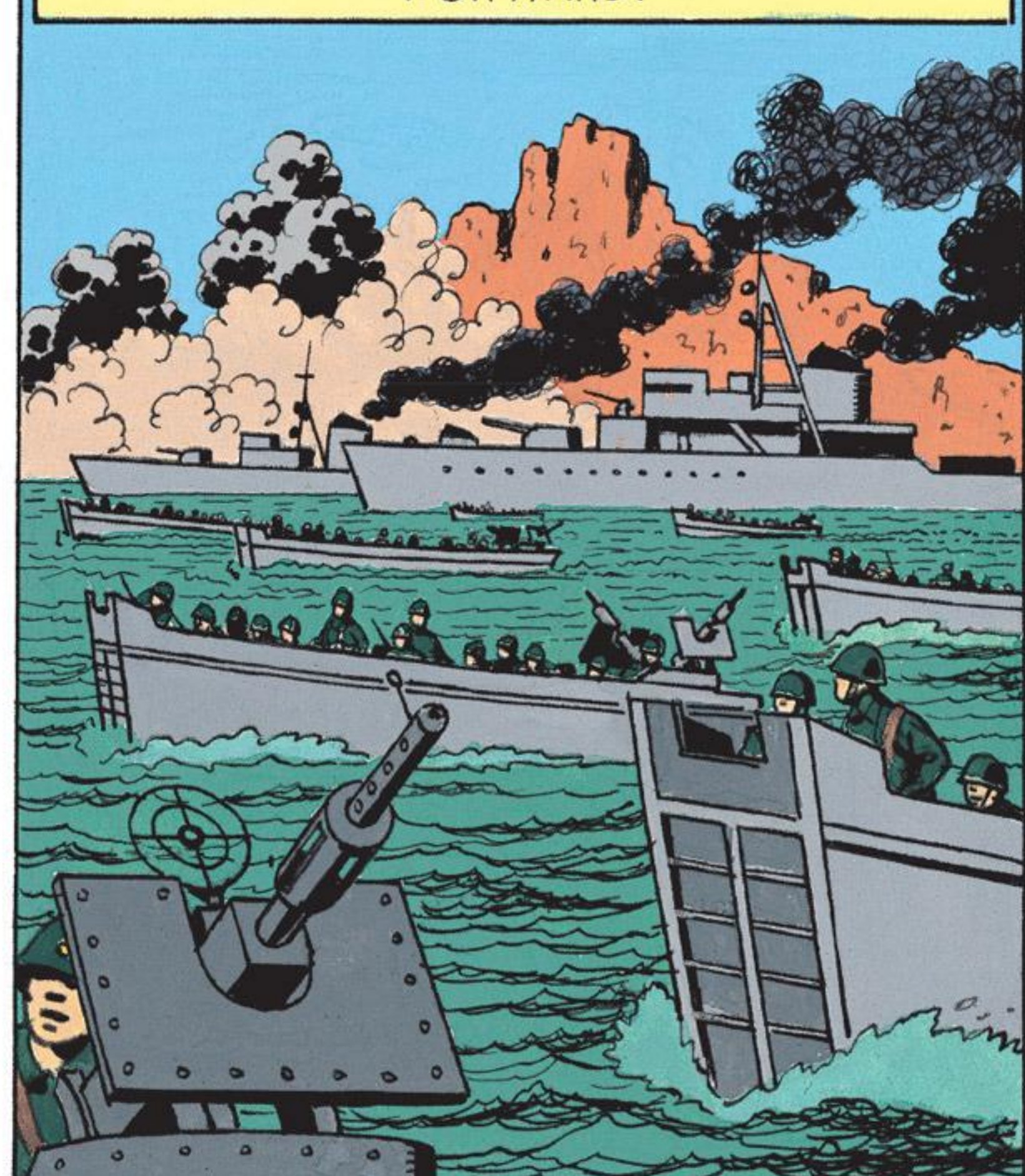


AT LAST, AFTER 30 MINUTES OF CONSTANT SHELLING, THE BARRAGE STOPS AS QUICKLY AS IT HAD BEGUN...



That's enough for now. Send in the assault barges...

PROTECTED BY THE SMOKE SCREEN AND SUPPORTED BY THE DESTROYERS, THE ASSAULT BARGES, CRAMMED WITH MEN AND LOW ON THE WATER, RUSH FORWARD.

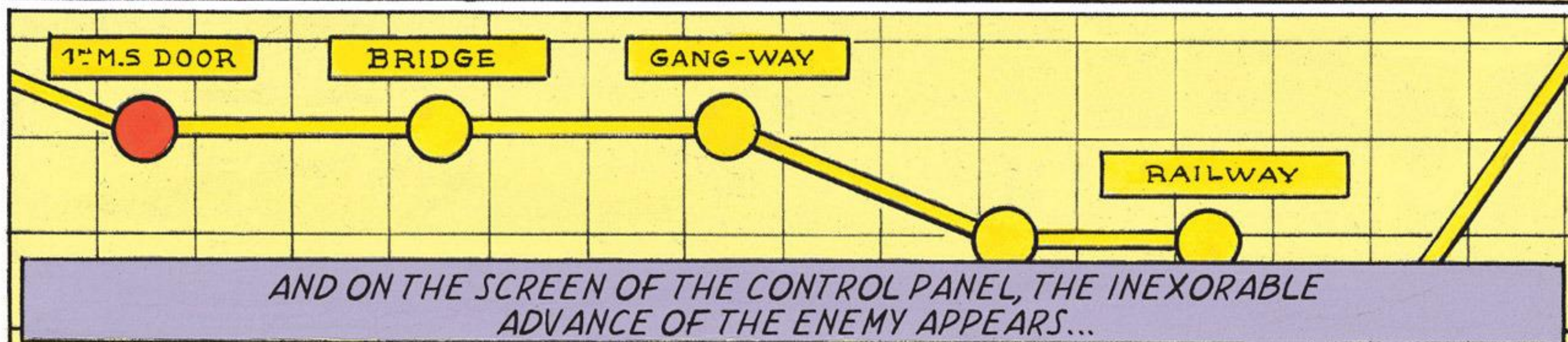


HIS EYES GLUED TO THE BINOCULARS, SIR WILLIAM VAINLY TRIES TO SEE THROUGH THE ARTIFICIAL FOG.

Dammit! Can't make out a thing through that blasted fog!



Hello! Hello! This is the information centre... Makran watch reports the Imperials are through door number one. They are inside the cave and advancing towards the bridge!!!



AND ON THE SCREEN OF THE CONTROL PANEL, THE INEXORABLE ADVANCE OF THE ENEMY APPEARS...

Right!... C.P. to Makran watch... Ready on plan B... C.P. to artillery. All batteries standing by?... Good...



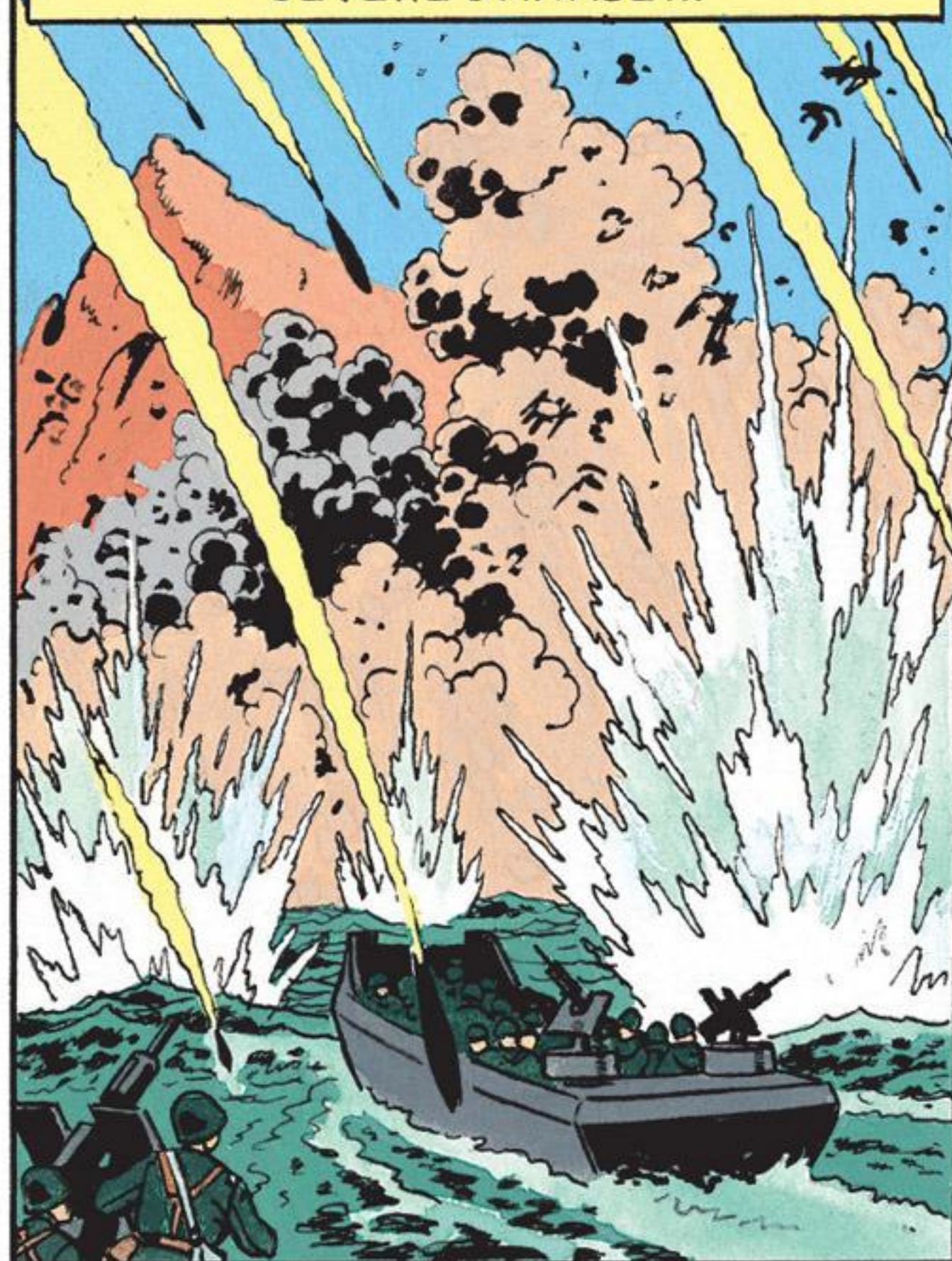
If only the wind could pick up... Ah! There they are!... Two cable lengths away!... Ready, Blake?...



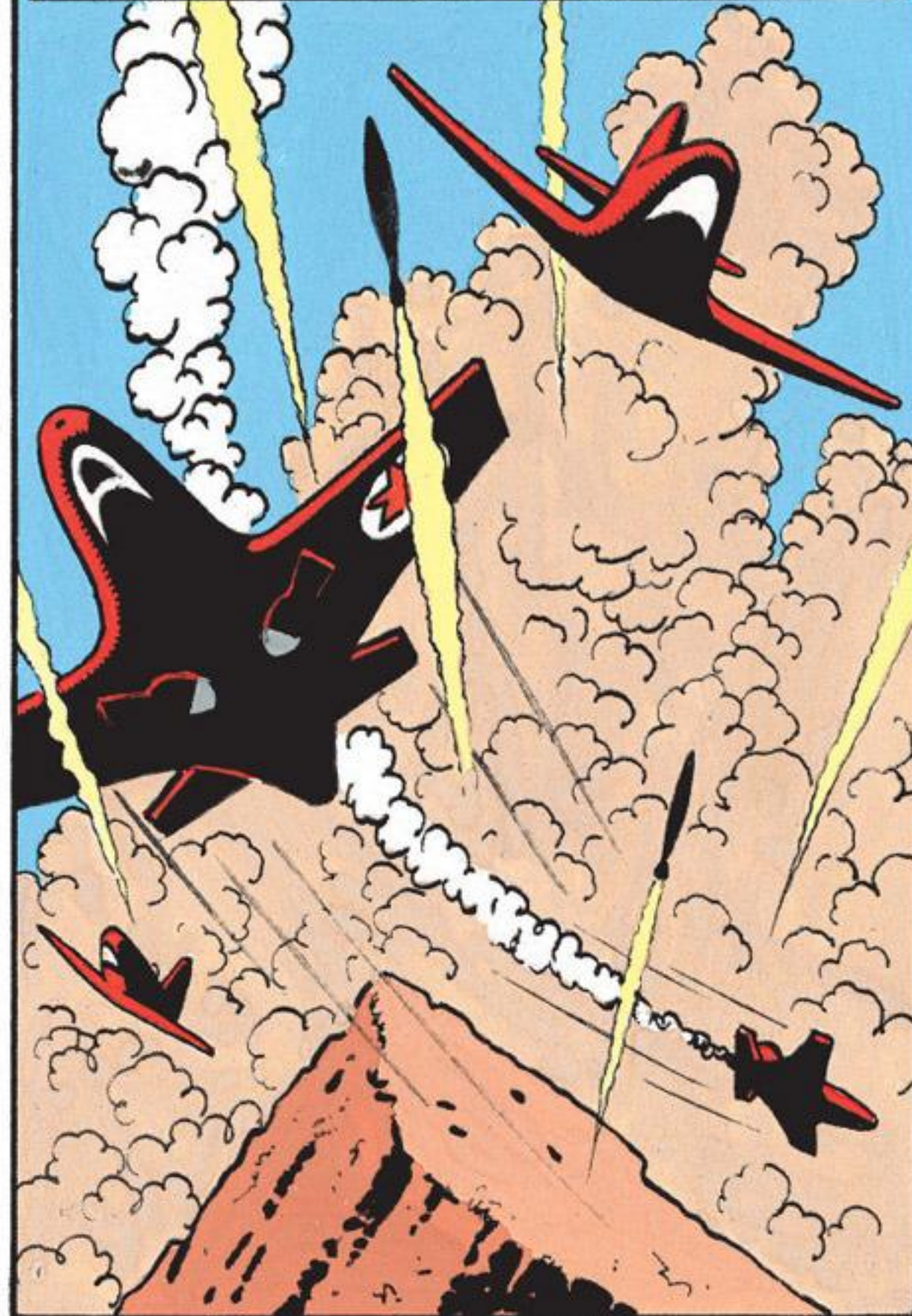
Fire!...



EVERY GUN IN THE BASE OPENS UP AT ONCE. STRUCK AT POINT-BLANK RANGE, THE BARGES SINK WITH ALL HANDS WHILE SEVERAL DESTROYERS THAT HAD CARELESSLY MOVED TOO CLOSE HASTILY RETREAT WITH SEVERE DAMAGE...



LURED IN BY THE ABSENCE OF AERIAL RESISTANCE, LOW-FLYING PLANES ARE PROMPTLY TARGETED BY THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCE'S MAGNETIC ROCKETS...



...WHILE BELOW THE SURFACE THE SUBMARINES RUN FOUL OF THE MINEFIELDS THAT PROTECT THE APPROACHES TO THE MAIN ENTRANCE...



THE TERRIFIC DAMAGE INFLICTED BY THE FIERCENESS AND SUDDENNESS OF THE DEFENCE STOPS THE IMPERIAL ASSAULT DEAD IN ITS TRACKS...

But... But our losses are enormous, Colonel!

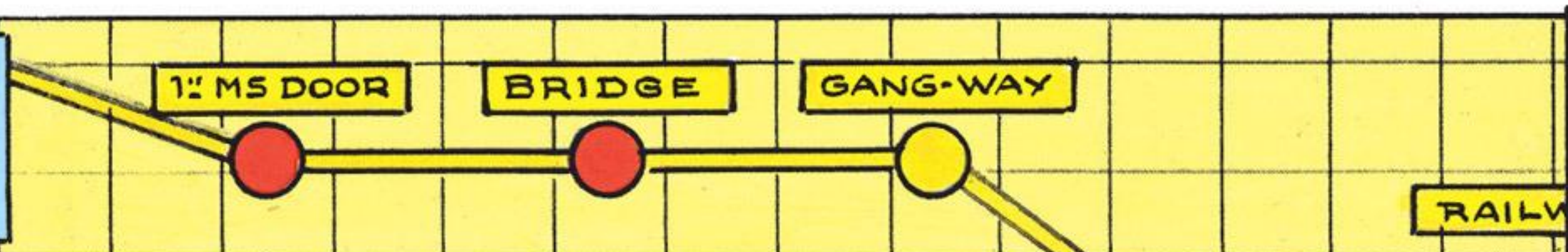
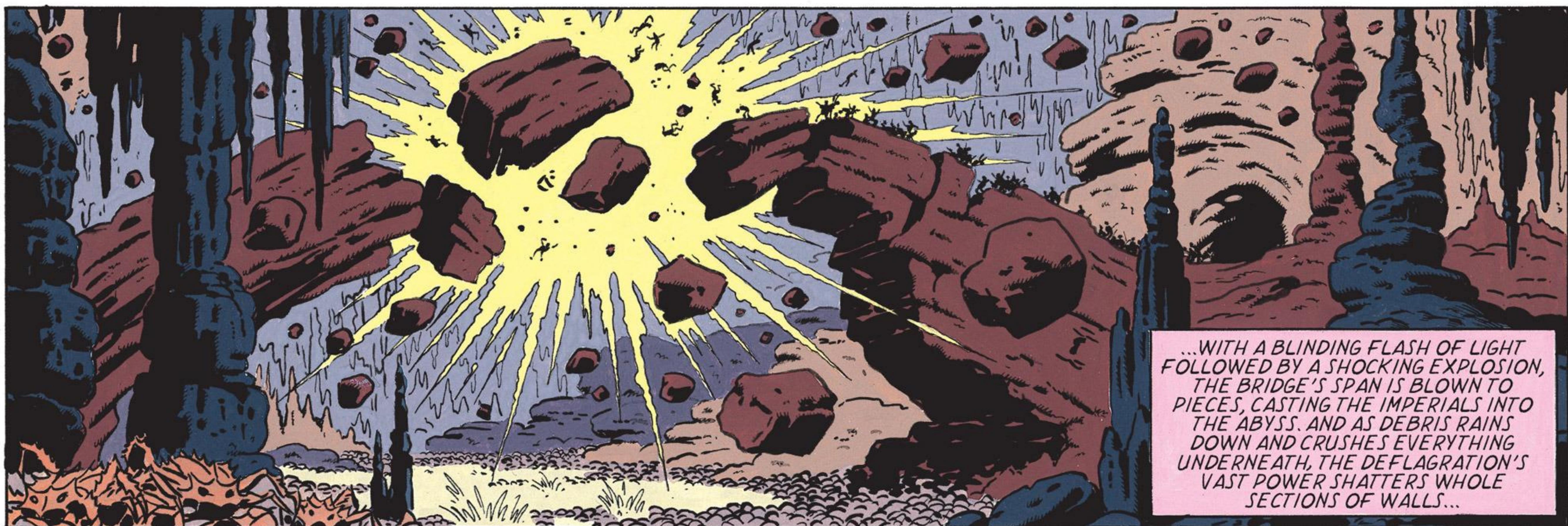
Look at this with a calm mind, gentlemen! And remember that by keeping the British's attention on this sector, we are making things much easier for the troops that are currently progressing through the tunnel.




INDEED, WHILE THE BATTLE RAGES ON ABOVE THE WAVES, THE IMPERIALS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN BREACHING THE FIRST DOOR AND ARE NOW PREPARING TO CROSS THE BRIDGE THAT SPANS THE CRAB PIT...



BUT THE OFFICER WHO LEADS THE COLUMN, UNKNOWINGLY CUTTING THE INVISIBLE BEAM OF A CAESIUM ELECTRIC EYE, TRIGGERS THE RELEASE OF PLAN B, WHICH THE MAKRAN WATCH POST HAS JUST PRECISELY EXECUTED. AND...

...WITH A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT FOLLOWED BY A SHOCKING EXPLOSION, THE BRIDGE'S SPAN IS BLOWN TO PIECES, CASTING THE IMPERIALS INTO THE ABYSS. AND AS DEBRIS RAINS DOWN AND CRUSHES EVERYTHING UNDERNEATH, THE DEFLAGRATION'S VAST POWER SHATTERS WHOLE SECTIONS OF WALLS...

...THAT COLLAPSE ON THE SURVIVORS WHO'D RETREATED TO THE TUNNELS IN COMPLETE DISARRAY.



HEARING NEWS OF THE DISASTER, A SEETHING OLRİK ORDERS A GENERAL RETREAT, AND SOON...



Hello! Hello! This is the information centre! The Imperials are falling back everywhere!...

Boys!... The score's one-nil for old England!

Outstanding!... But watch out for the second half!



ABOARD THE CARRIER WHERE OLRİK HAS TRANSFERRED HIS COMMAND POST, THE MOOD IS TENSE. INFURIATED BY THEIR FAILURE, THE IMPERIAL OFFICERS ARE CLAMOURING FOR EXTREME MEASURES!

Now, Colonel, why not simply vaporise their entire lair with our atomic weapons and...

...at the same time annihilate the Swordfish and its secrets, right?... No, gentlemen, it is absolutely vital that we get our hands on that machine!... But don't worry, I know another way...

Radio, take note and transmit in code the order I'm about to dictate: 'Colonel Orlık, commander of the expeditionary corps, on board carrier Kang-Hi, to Colonel Taksa, commander of the secret arsenal, Lhasa - stop - send two tons GX3 bombs immediately - stop - special mission, top priority - stop'.

These weapons haven't been used yet, but I give you my word that before the sun rises, the Imperial flag will be flying over that scornful rock!

MEANWHILE, IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOM...

...Yes, old chap. Barring an accident, we'll be ready on schedule... In fact, after your victory we're all raring to go!

Oh, it's only a reprieve!... And you can bet your last penny that the Imperials are cooking up something nasty for tonight!... So we're counting on your Swordfish more than ever!

NIGHT FALLS AND THE HOURS SLOWLY TICK BY, HEAVY WITH DREAD. ON BOTH SIDES RADARS, DETECTORS AND PERISCOPES SEARCH THE NIGHT, EVER ATTENTIVE...

RETURNING FROM INSPECTING THE BATTERIES, SIR WILLIAM AND BLAKE ENTER THE LOOKOUT POST.

Anything new, Adam?

No, sir, apart from the arrival of three bombers an hour ago. They were coming from the east, north-east and landed on the Kang-Hi. Nothing since.

It's too quiet... I don't like it...

JUST THEN...

The Imperials are attacking!!!

THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERIES FILL THE AIR WITH LEAD AND STEEL, BUT THE ATTACK WAS LAUNCHED SO SUDDENLY THAT TWO OF THE BOMBERS, FLYING THROUGH THE MAN-MADE STORM, MANAGE TO SCORE SEVERAL DIRECT HITS... TO THE PERPLEXITY OF THE DEFENDERS, HOWEVER, THE PECULIAR BOMBS CAUSE NO EXPLOSIONS WHEN THEY BURST, BUT INSTEAD RELEASE AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF SMOKE. THE HEAVY CURLS UNFOLD AND CREEP OUTWARDS, SOON ENVELOPING THE ENTIRE BASE IN A HUGE GREENISH CLOUD...

THE DREADED CALL RESOUNDS...

Gas!!! It's a gas attack!!! Put on your masks!!!

THE ALERT SPREADS THROUGH THE BASE IN A FLASH, AND EVERY SOLDIER, ADJUSTING HIS MASK...

... GETS READY TO FACE THIS NEW OPPONENT WITH FIERCE DETERMINATION ...

AT LAST THE INEVITABLE ORDER COMES!

All defensive positions!... Retreat! Fall back inside! Leave no man behind! Lock airtight hatches!... Hurry!...

ALAS! THE CHOKING SWIRLS SEEP THROUGH EMBRASURES AND OBSERVATION PORTS, RAPIDLY FILLING GUN EMPLACEMENTS AND BUNKERS. IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE HORRIFIED DEFENDERS TO REALISE THAT THE FILTERS OF THEIR MASKS ARE POWERLESS TO STOP THAT SUBTLE POISON. SUFFOCATING, THE MEN COLLAPSE AND WRITHE ON THE GROUND, STRUGGLING DESPERATELY AGAINST THAT STRANGE, APPALLING FOE...

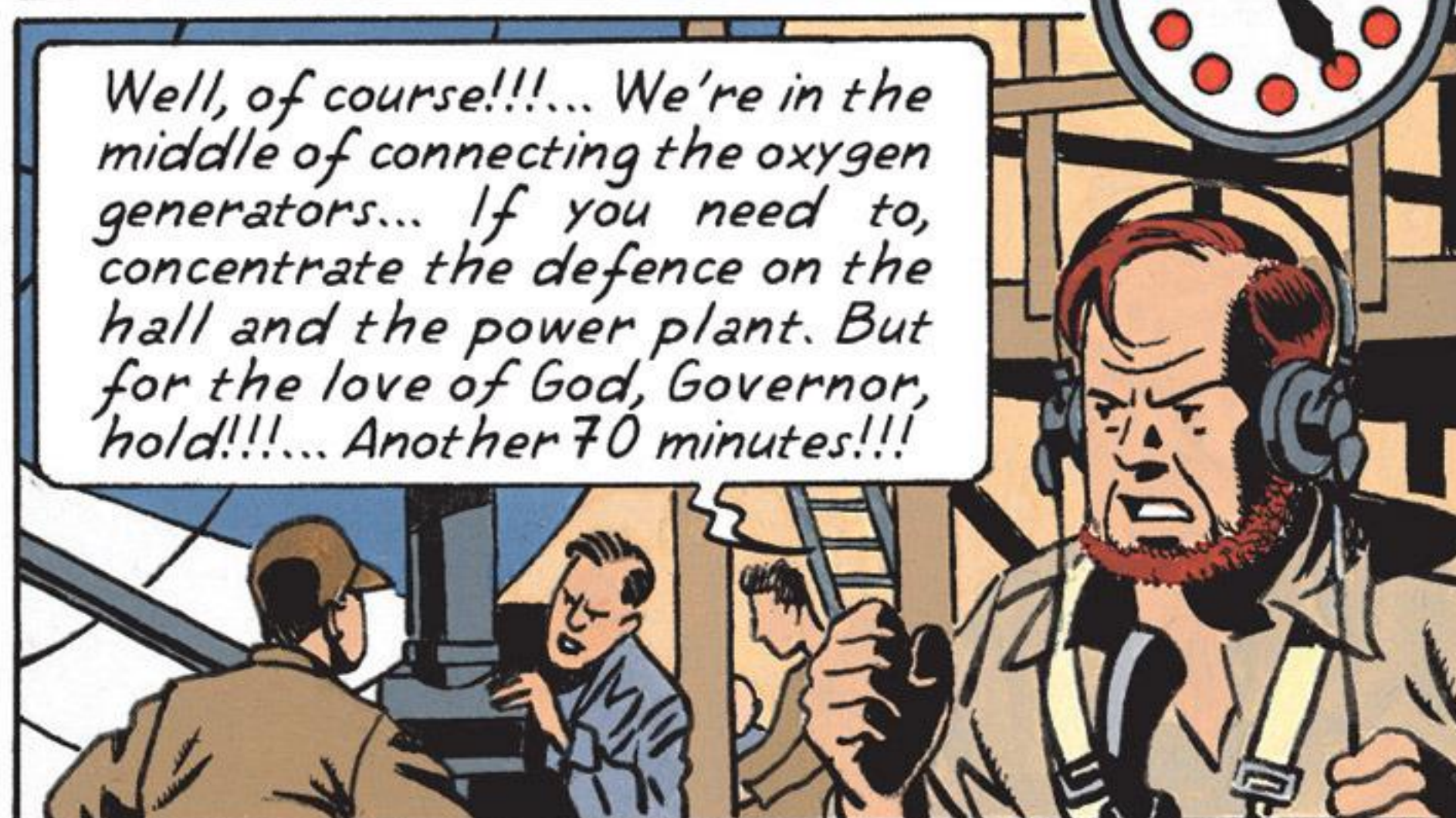
FORCED TO BEAT A HASTY RETREAT IN VIEW OF THE VIRULENCE OF THE 'GREEN GAS', THE DEFENDERS, CARRYING THEIR WOUNDED, WITHDRAW TO BASE, CLOSING BEHIND THEM THE HEAVY, AIRTIGHT STEEL DOORS.



Hello!... Things are taking a turn for the worse here, Mortimer!... Yes, some unknown gas... We're going to barricade every corridor and fight them for every inch of ground, but our already limited forces have suffered severe losses, so... Anyway, does your deadline still stand?...



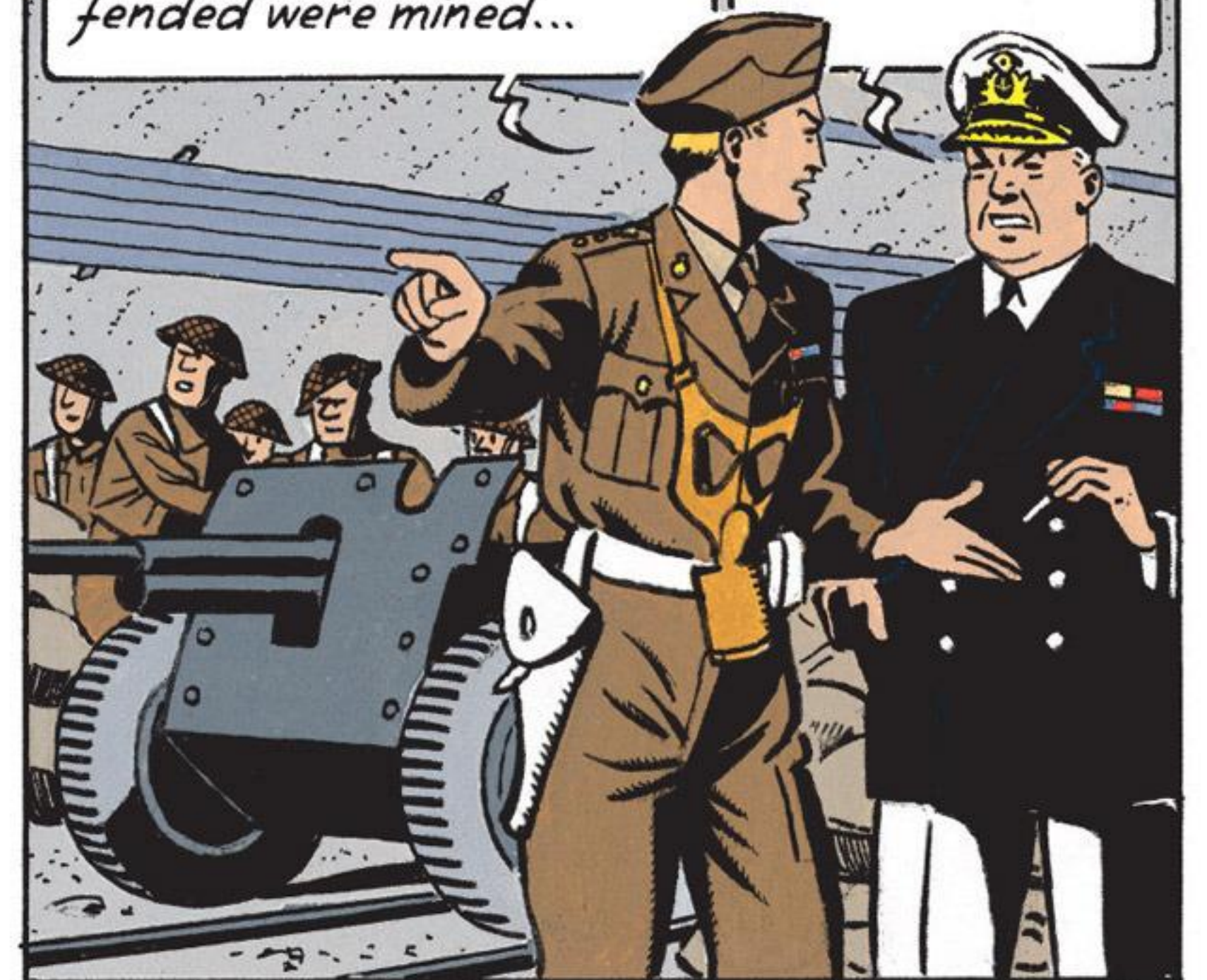
Well, of course!!!... We're in the middle of connecting the oxygen generators... If you need to, concentrate the defence on the hall and the power plant. But for the love of God, Governor, hold!!!!... Another 70 minutes!!!



BLAKE, WHO WAS WITH THE REARGUARD, NOW JOINS SIR WILLIAM, WHO COMMANDS THE DEFENCE OF THE ASSEMBLY ROOM.

I've set up staggered groups to harry the enemy all along the path that leads to this last barricade. The passages that can't be defended were mined...

Well, I do believe there's nothing more we can do, Blake!



FROM THE BRIDGE OF THE KANG-HI, OLRIK AND HIS STAFF INTENTLY FOLLOW THE OPERATIONS' PROGRESS...

Ha! Ha! They've stopped firing!... Good! Major, give the signal to the assault barges!

Yes, Colonel.



AND FOR THE SECOND TIME, BARGES HEAVY WITH TROOPS CONVERGE ON THE ENORMOUS ROCK, NOW SILENT...



UPON ARRIVAL, THE CRAFT LOWER THEIR BOW RAMPS AND THE SOLDIERS JUMP INTO THE WATER. PROTECTED BY THEIR SPECIAL MASKS, THEY ADVANCE SWIFTLY THROUGH THE ACRID SMOKE...



Captain, the enemy retreated inside after blocking the firing slits!

It doesn't matter, Lieutenant. Open a breach with explosives and use the flame-throwers to clean up!



IMMEDIATELY A GROUP OF SAPPERS HURRY FORWARD WITH THEIR EQUIPMENT AND BEGIN PIERCING A HOLE THROUGH THE COLOSSAL STONE WALL...



The final act has just begun, sir. Time is running out for the Swordfish!

No doubt... But whether we are victorious or defeated, I give you my word that if they get their hands on the Swordfish, it will be as scrap metal, dammit!!!

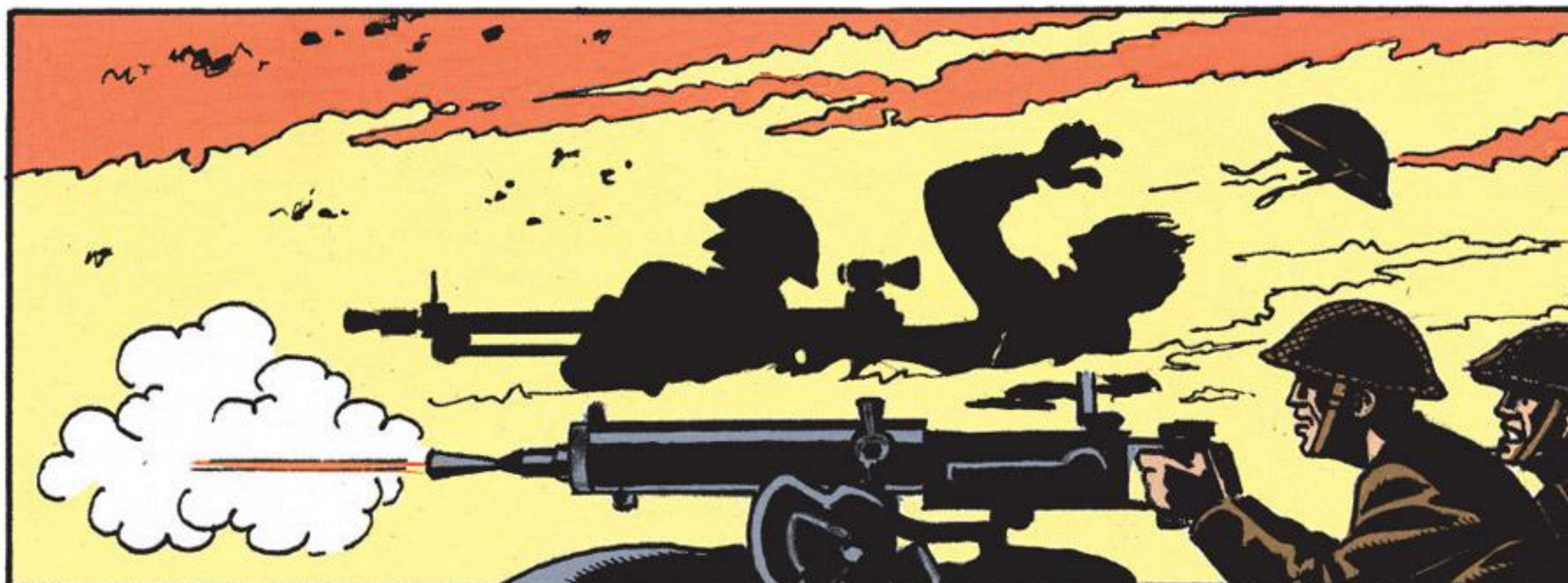


JUST THEN, THE MINE EXPLODES WITH A THUNDEROUS BANG, GUTTING A GUN EMPLACEMENT AND OPENING A LARGE BREACH...





THE DUST FROM THE EXPLOSION HAS BARELY BEGUN TO CLEAR BEFORE THE IMPERIALS ARE THROUGH THE BREACH, FLAME-THROWERS LEADING THE WAY...

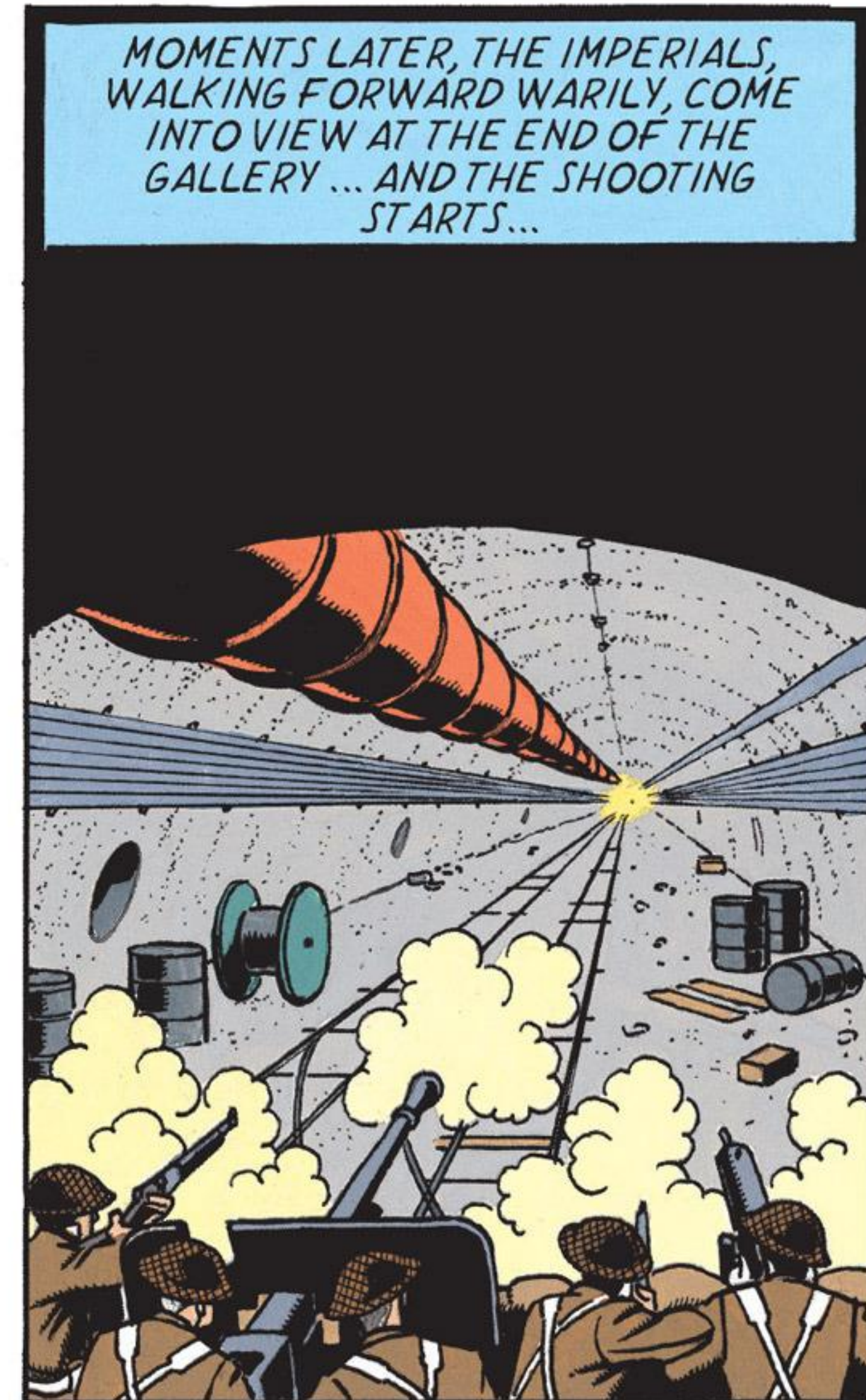


THE HARRYING SQUADS OFFER BITTER RESISTANCE BUT THE ATTACKERS, WITH THEIR TERRIBLE WEAPONS, SCORCH EVERYTHING IN THEIR WAY, TAKE THE POSITIONS ONE AFTER THE OTHER AND FINALLY REACH THE LAST DOOR THAT BARS THE GALLERY LEADING TO THE ASSEMBLY ROOM. SOON IT TOO IS BLOWN OPEN...



Well, it's our turn now...

Even if Mortimer finishes on schedule, I'm afraid it will be too late!...

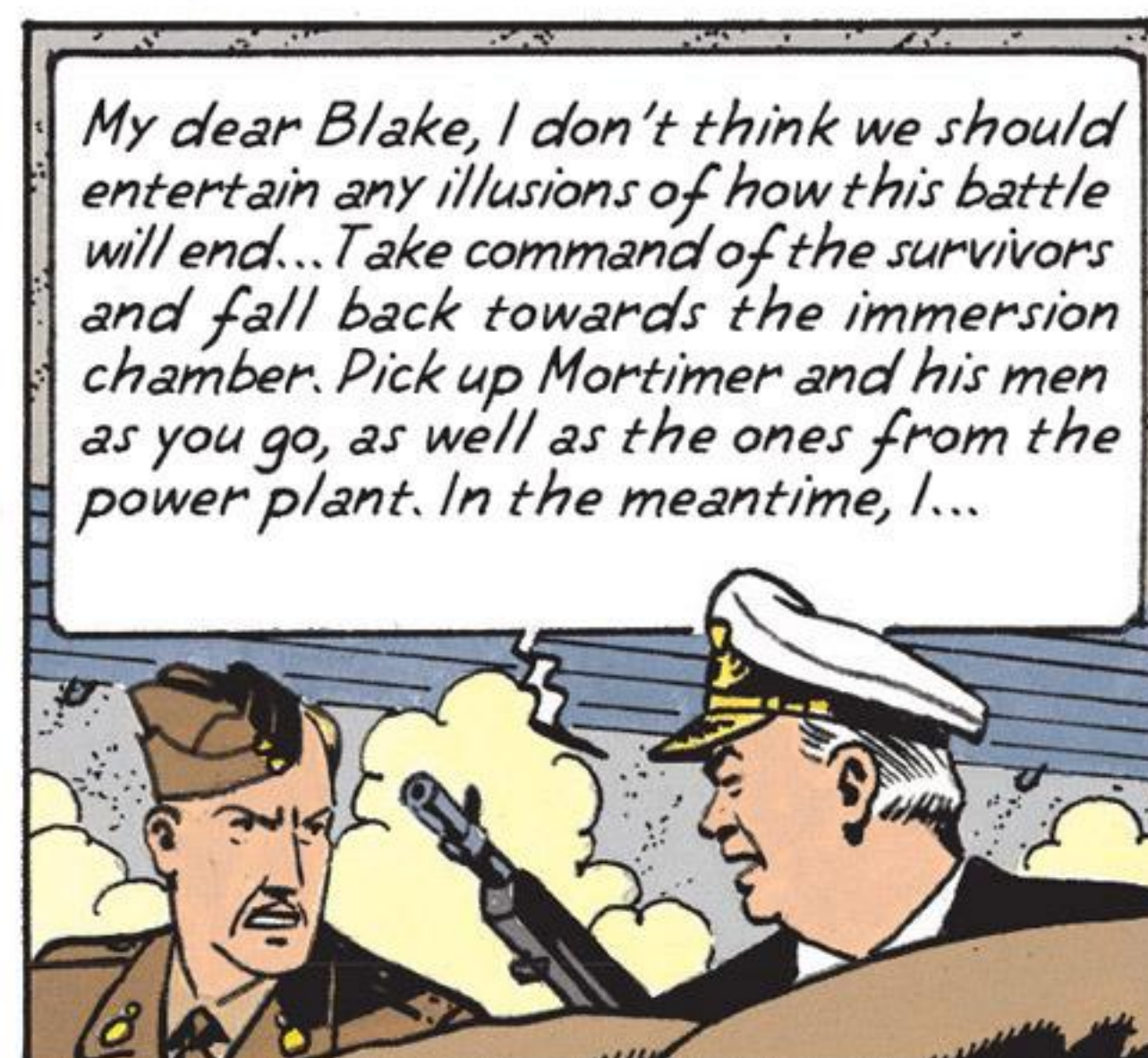


MOMENTS LATER, THE IMPERIALS, WALKING FORWARD WARILY, COME INTO VIEW AT THE END OF THE GALLERY ... AND THE SHOOTING STARTS...

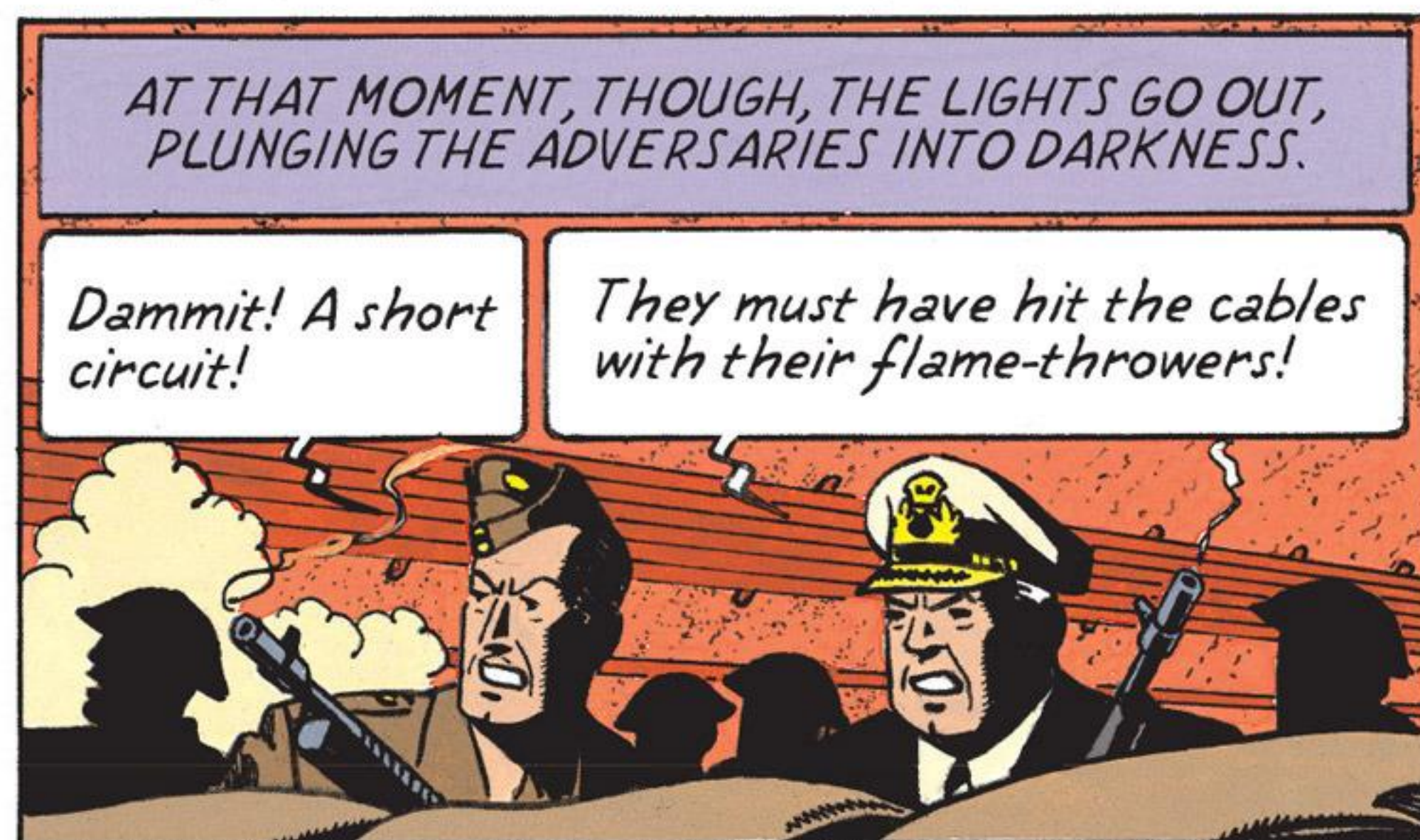


Crikey! The more you shoot, the more keep on coming!

Yes, and if they manage to get close enough to use their flame-throwers, our goose will be well and truly cooked – and so will we!!!



My dear Blake, I don't think we should entertain any illusions of how this battle will end... Take command of the survivors and fall back towards the immersion chamber. Pick up Mortimer and his men as you go, as well as the ones from the power plant. In the meantime, I...



AT THAT MOMENT, THOUGH, THE LIGHTS GO OUT, PLUNGING THE ADVERSARIES INTO DARKNESS.

Dammit! A short circuit!

They must have hit the cables with their flame-throwers!



UNDER COVER OF THE DARKNESS AND DESPITE THEIR LOSSES, THE IMPERIALS KEEP CREEPING FORWARD. ALREADY SPARKS ARE BEGINNING TO FALL AMONG THE DEFENDERS, COMING DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO AN AMMUNITION TRAIN WAITING BEHIND THE BARRICADE...

Heavens! Move these blasted wagons back!... If the fire reaches the ammo, we'll all go up in smoke!!!

We can't reverse, sir. The switch is stuck!



THEN NASIR SPEAKS UP...

Wait, sahib, I know a way!...

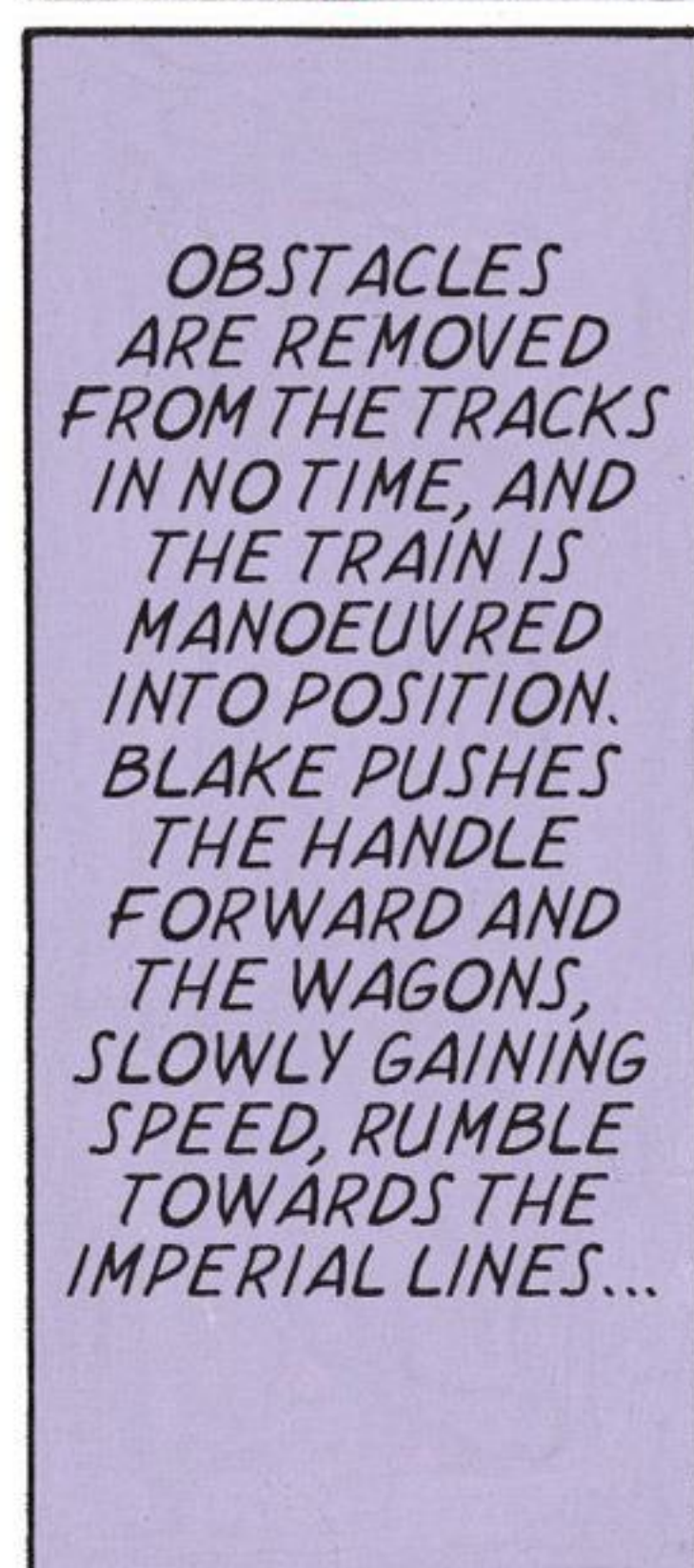


You, Nasir? How would you do it?

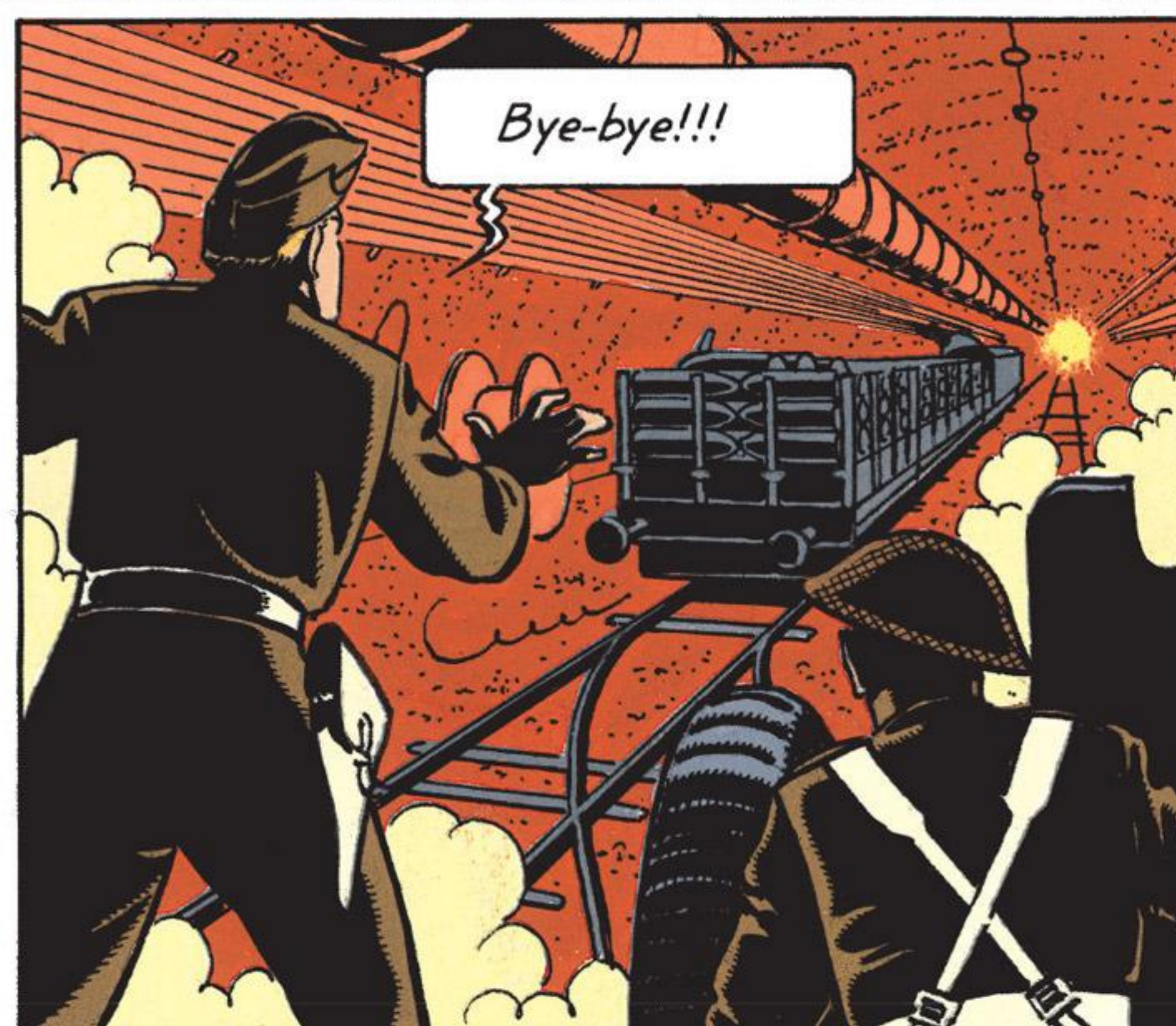
Well, I'd tell the sahib to send the train forward!



Great Scott! That's a smashing idea! Come on, boys, quick – clear up these rails!



OBSTACLES ARE REMOVED FROM THE TRACKS IN NO TIME, AND THE TRAIN IS MANOEUVRED INTO POSITION. BLAKE PUSHES THE HANDLE FORWARD AND THE WAGONS, SLOWLY GAINING SPEED, RUMBLE TOWARDS THE IMPERIAL LINES...



Bye-bye!!!



And now, boys, hit the deck quickly if you don't want to go heaven just yet!!!



SEEING THAT UNEXPECTED OPPONENT RUSH TOWARDS THEM, THE STARTLED IMPERIALS TAKE IT FOR A DESPERATE COUNTER-ATTACK OF THE BESIEGED AND IMMEDIATELY CONCENTRATE THE JETS OF THEIR FLAME-THROWERS ON THE THREAT...



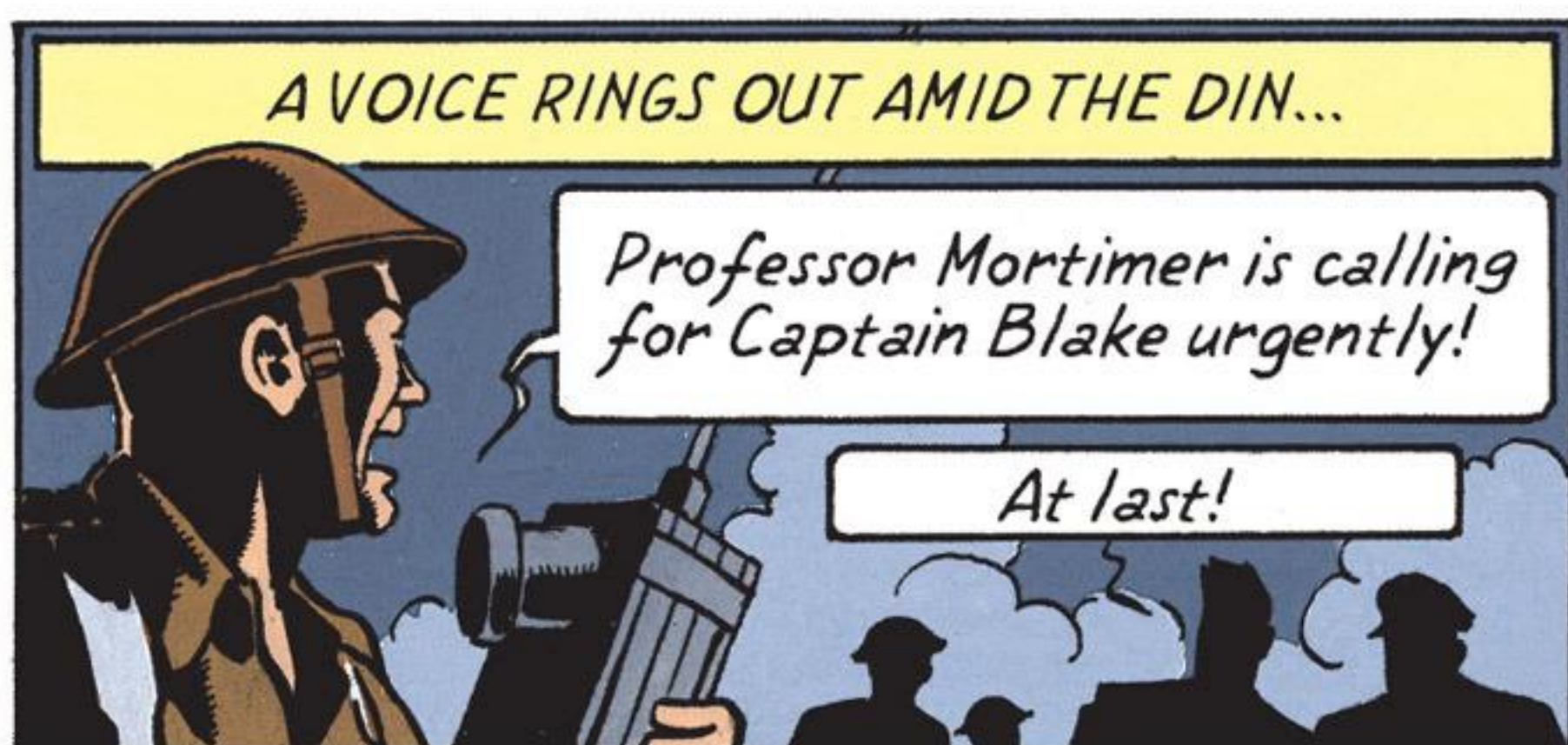
THE RESULT IS PREDICTABLE. A BLINDING FLASH IS INSTANTLY FOLLOWED BY A DEAFENING EXPLOSION THAT OBLITERATES THE TRAIN AND EVERYTHING NEAR IT, CAUSING PART OF THE GALLERY TO COLLAPSE AND BLOWING DOWN THE BRITISH BARRICADE...



STUNNED, BRUISED AND BATTERED, BUT ALIVE, THE DEFENDERS PICK THEMSELVES UP FROM AMONG THE MASS OF SHATTERED DEBRIS, WHILE UNDERNEATH THE RUBBLE THE AMMUNITION CONTINUES TO GO OFF IN SUCCESSION...

Good grief! I think we got off easy!

Yes, and it's going to delay them for a good long time!



A VOICE RINGS OUT AMID THE DIN...

Professor Mortimer is calling for Captain Blake urgently!

At last!



Go on, Blake ... and good luck!

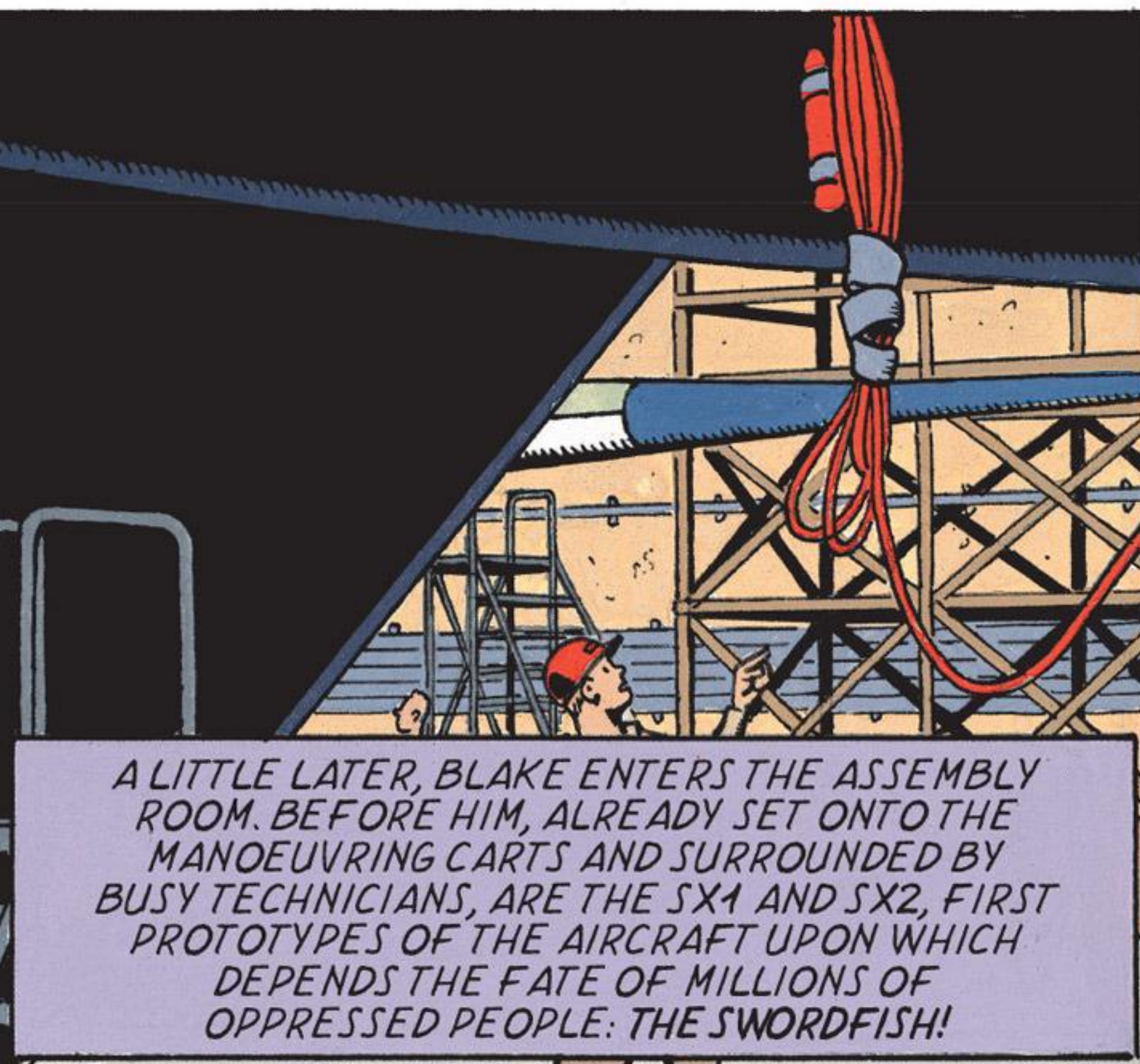
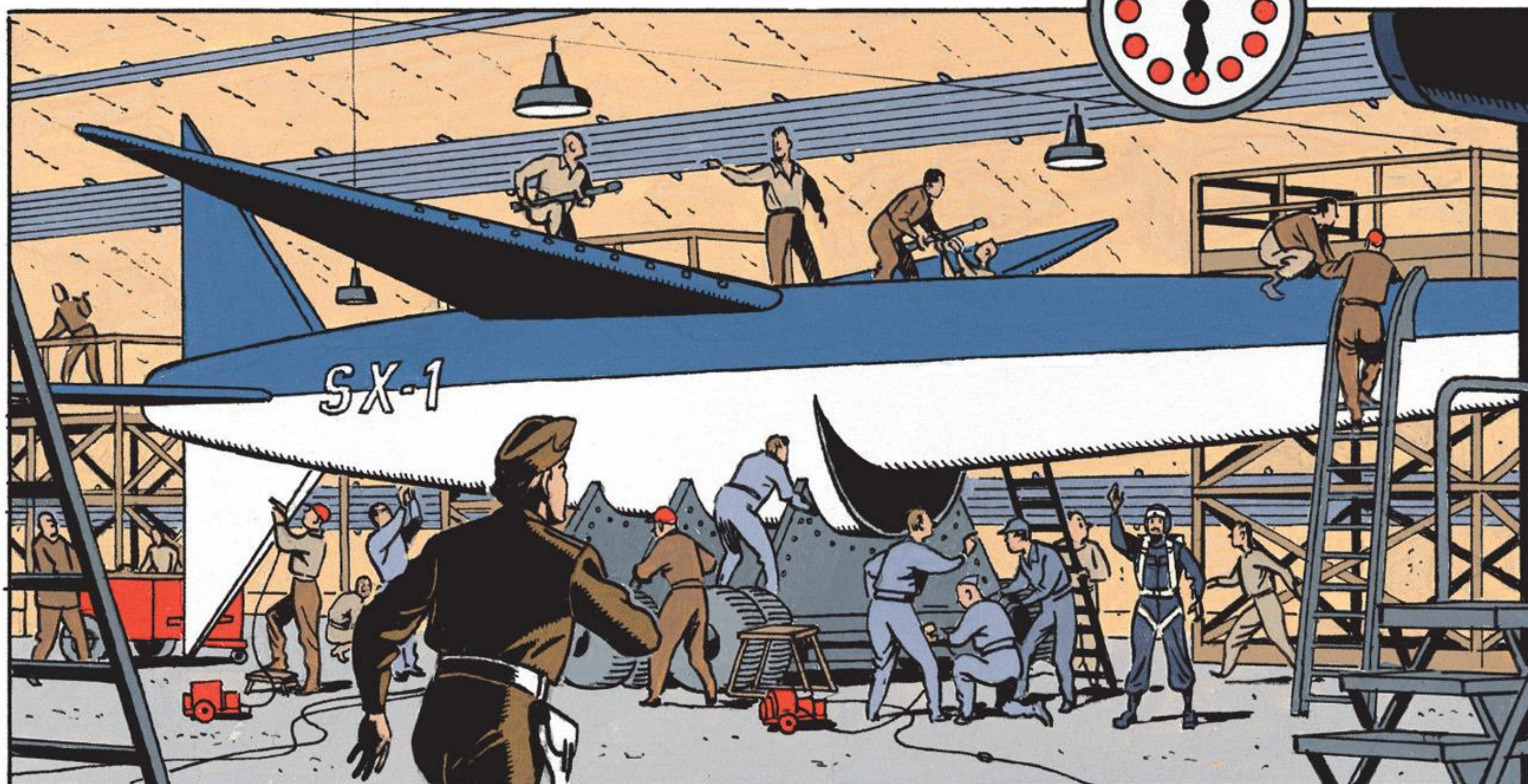
Thank you, sir. I won't let you down!



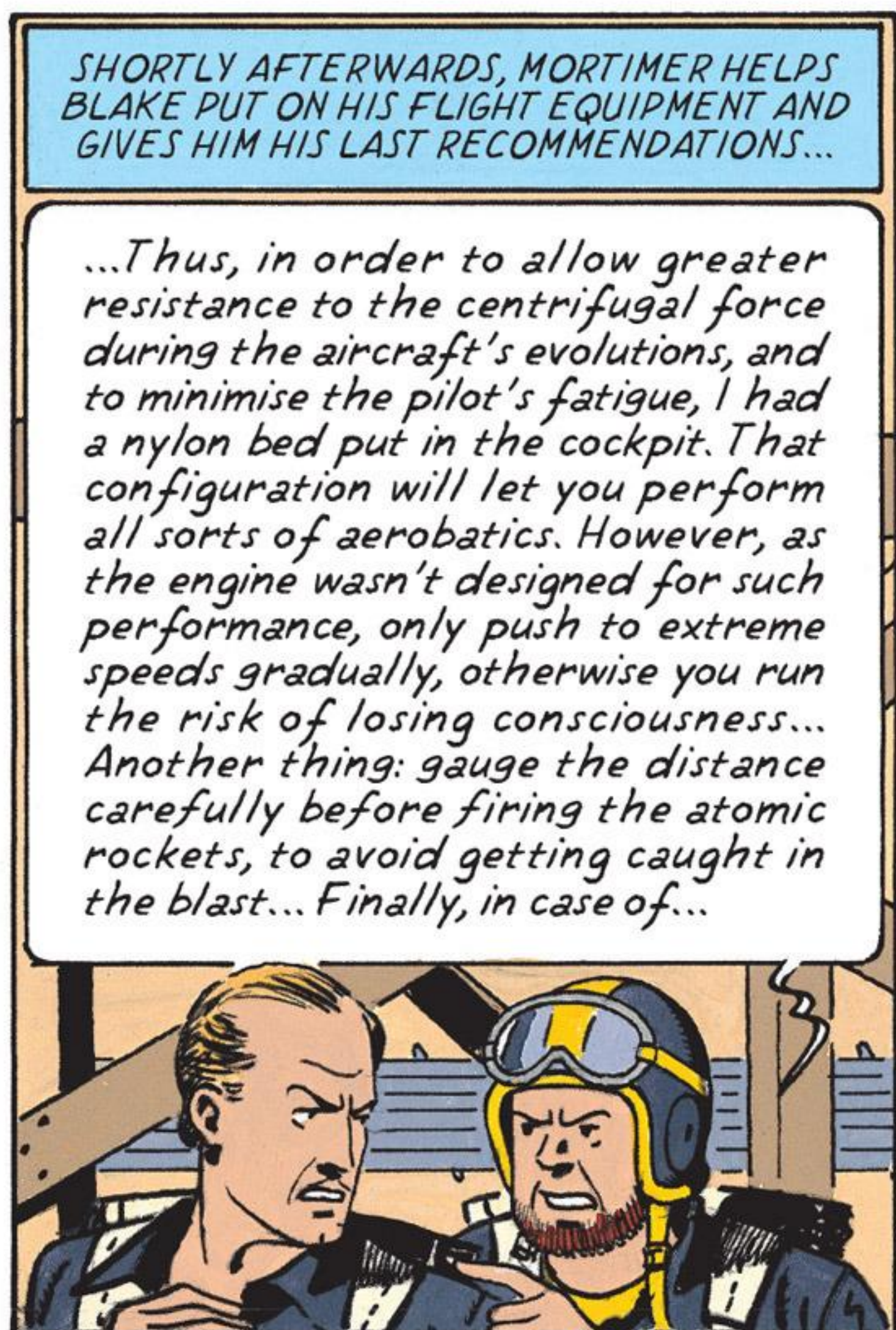
AND BLAKE DASHES OFF TOWARDS THE WORKSHOP...

May Allah protect you, sahib!

Goodbye, my friend!

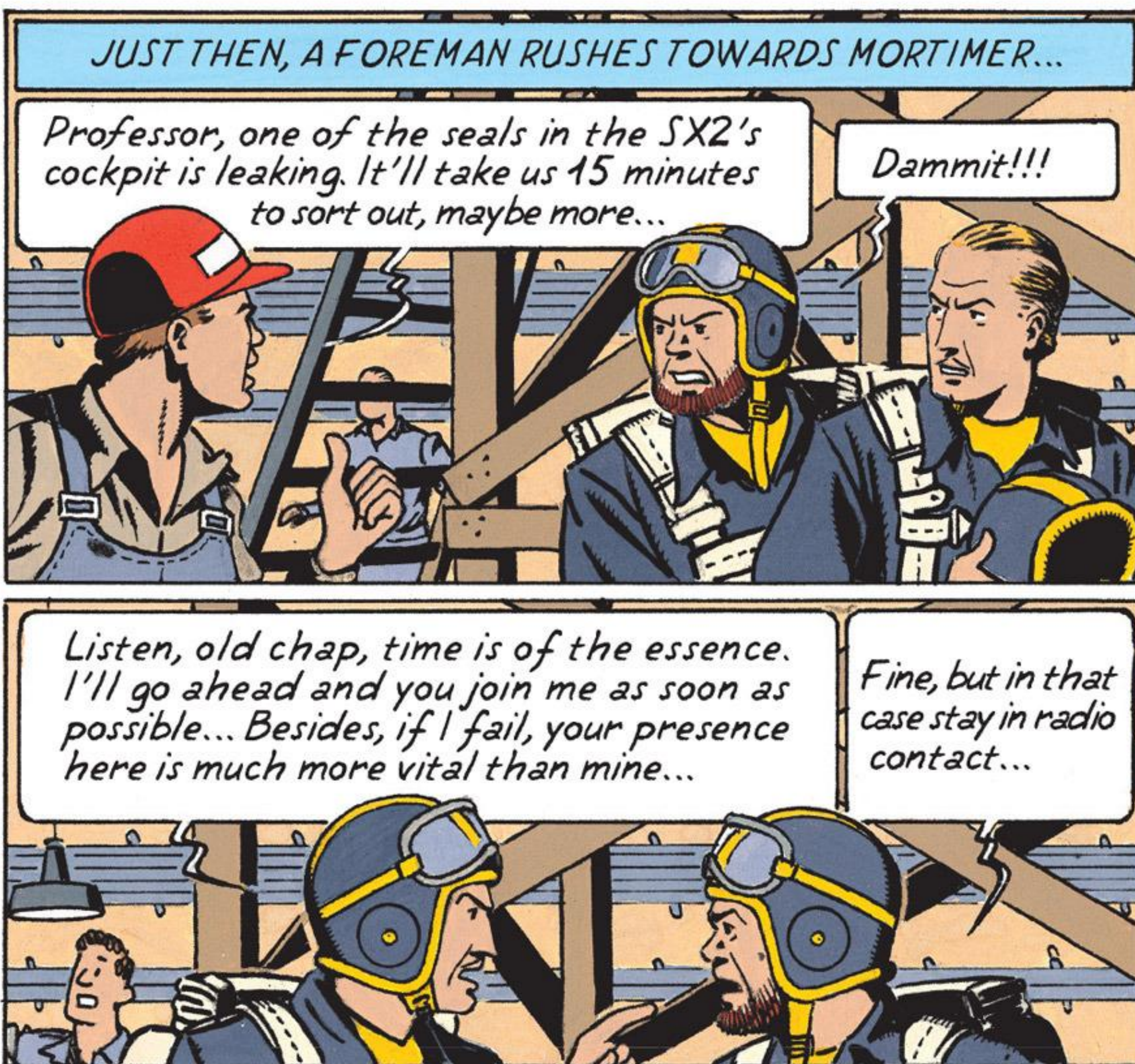


A LITTLE LATER, BLAKE ENTERS THE ASSEMBLY ROOM. BEFORE HIM, ALREADY SET ONTO THE MANOEUVRING CARTS AND SURROUNDED BY BUSY TECHNICIANS, ARE THE SX1 AND SX2, FIRST PROTOTYPES OF THE AIRCRAFT UPON WHICH DEPENDS THE FATE OF MILLIONS OF OPPRESSED PEOPLE: THE SWORDFISH!



SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, MORTIMER HELPS BLAKE PUT ON HIS FLIGHT EQUIPMENT AND GIVES HIM HIS LAST RECOMMENDATIONS...

...Thus, in order to allow greater resistance to the centrifugal force during the aircraft's evolutions, and to minimise the pilot's fatigue, I had a nylon bed put in the cockpit. That configuration will let you perform all sorts of aerobatics. However, as the engine wasn't designed for such performance, only push to extreme speeds gradually, otherwise you run the risk of losing consciousness... Another thing: gauge the distance carefully before firing the atomic rockets, to avoid getting caught in the blast... Finally, in case of...



JUST THEN, A FOREMAN RUSHES TOWARDS MORTIMER...

Professor, one of the seals in the SX2's cockpit is leaking. It'll take us 15 minutes to sort out, maybe more...

Dammit!!!

Listen, old chap, time is of the essence. I'll go ahead and you join me as soon as possible... Besides, if I fail, your presence here is much more vital than mine...

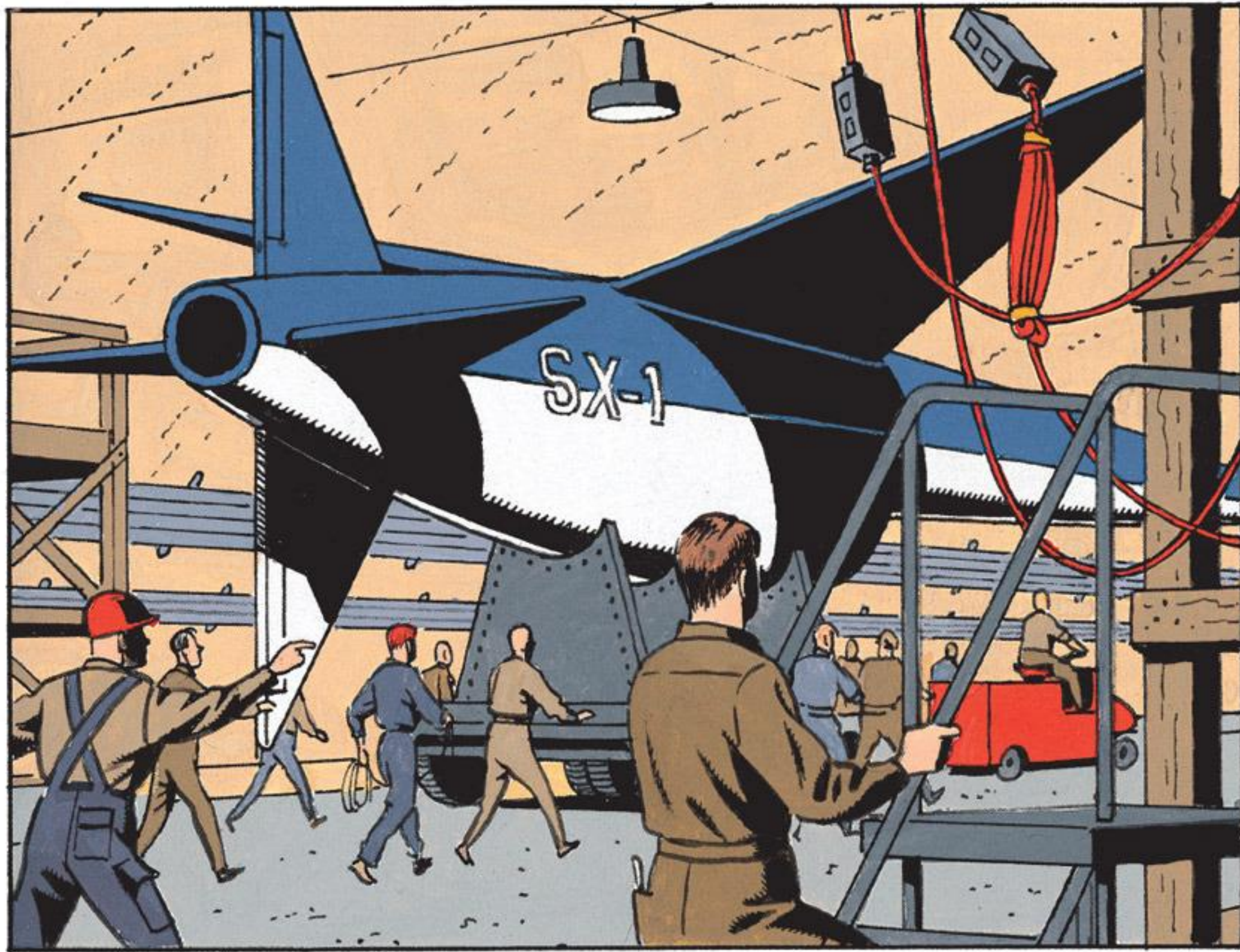
Fine, but in that case stay in radio contact...



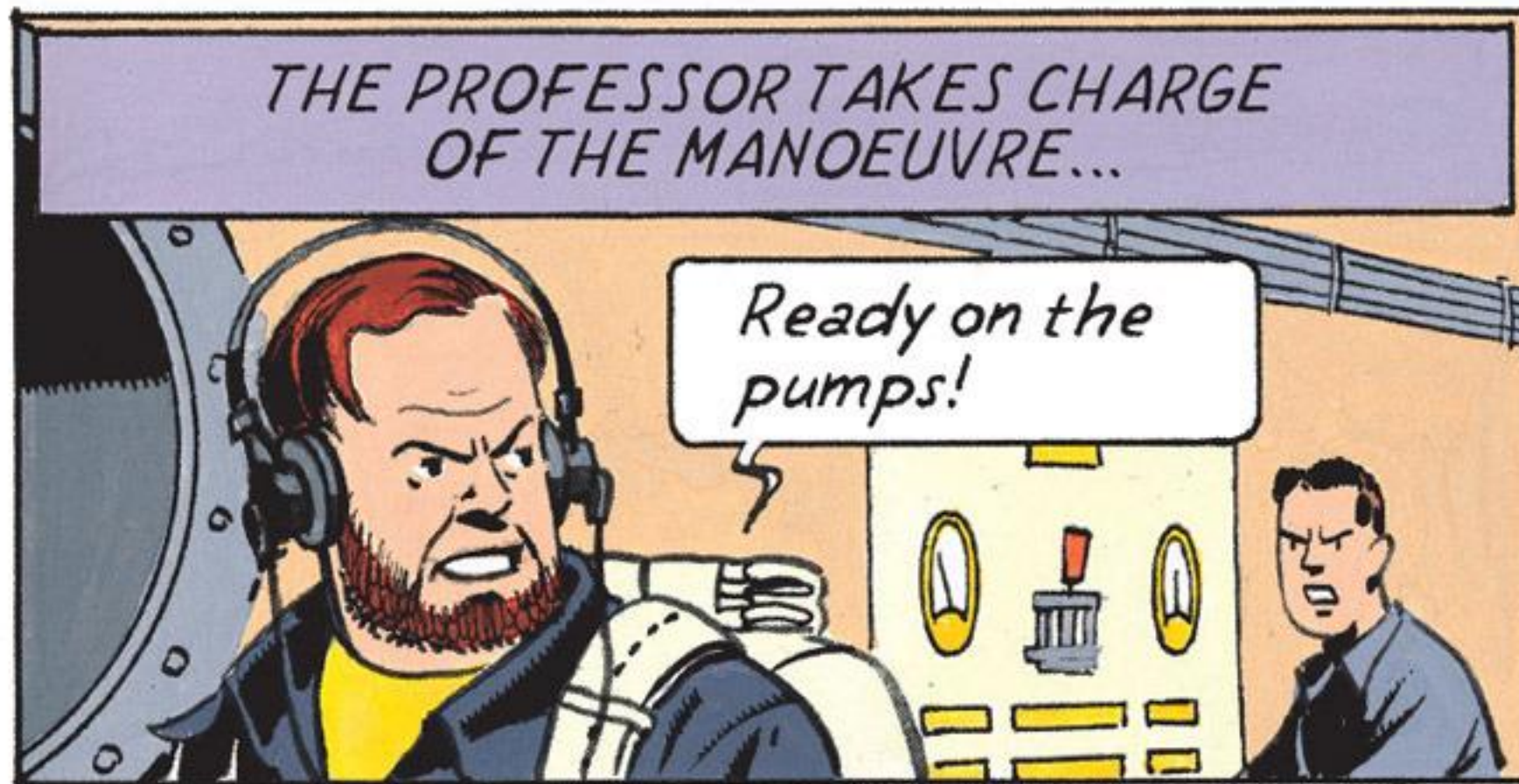
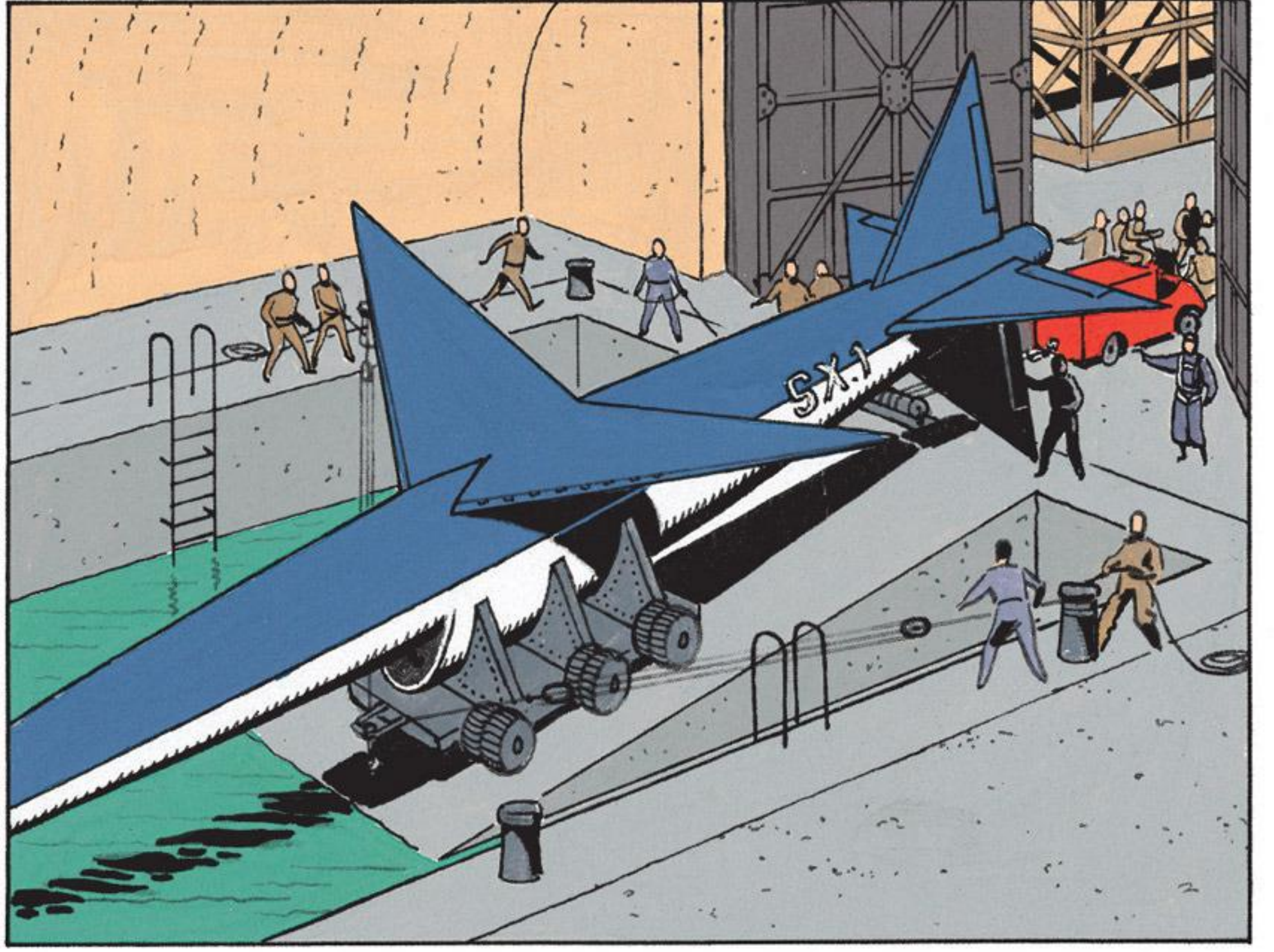
AND THE CAPTAIN, HAVING SAID HIS GOODBYES TO MORTIMER, SWIFTLY CLIMBS ABOARD THE SX1.

Cheerio, Mortimer!

Good luck, Blake!

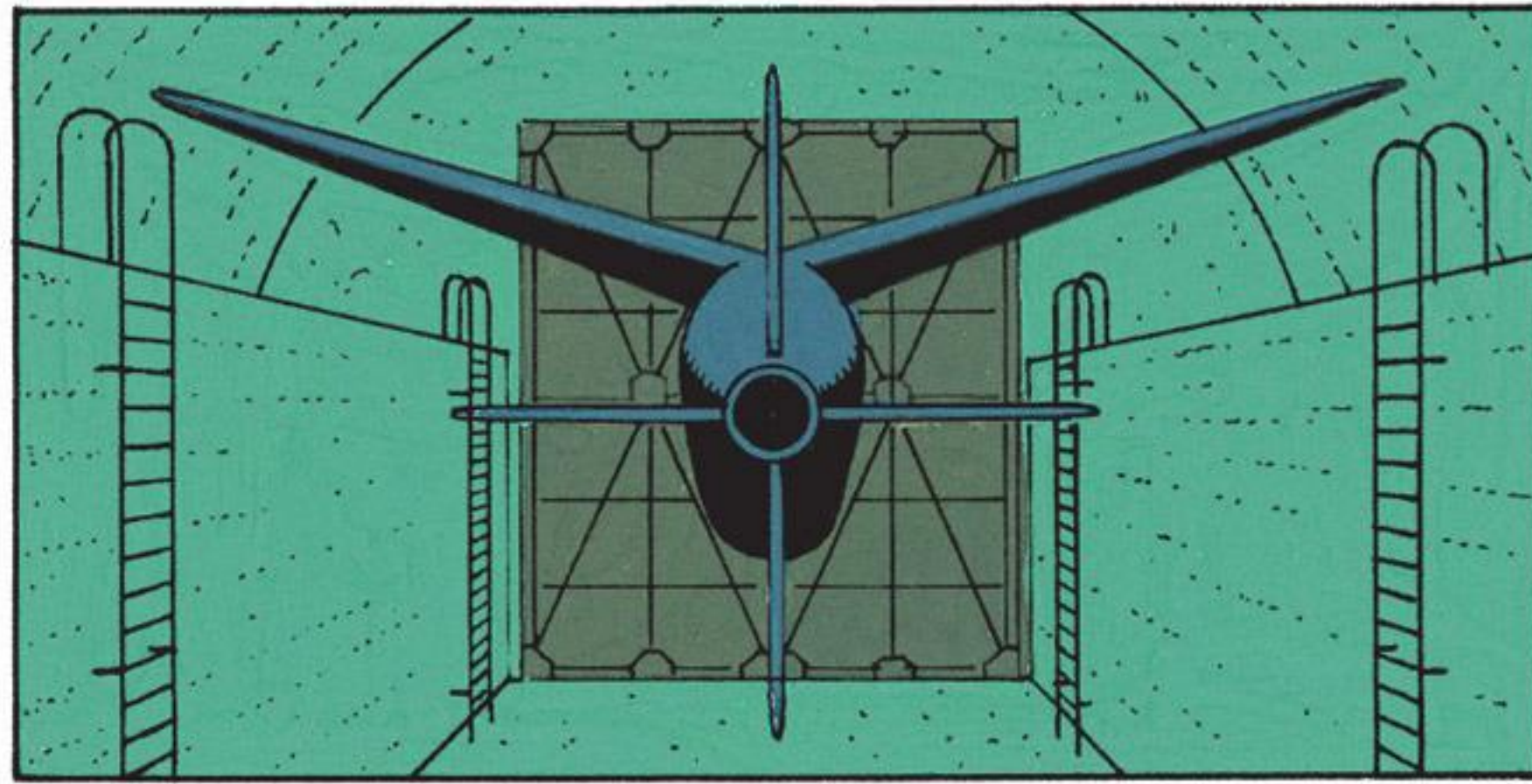


WHILE BLAKE STRAPS HIMSELF INTO THE COCKPIT, THE TECHNICIANS, FOLLOWING MORTIMER'S SIGNALS, HOOK A SMALL TRACTOR TO THE MANOEUVRING CART. THE STRANGE MACHINE IS IMMEDIATELY BROUGHT TOWARDS THE EXIT HATCH. PAST IT, THE MYSTERIOUS SWORDFISH, LIKE A GIGANTIC VERSION OF ITS NAMESAKE, ROLLS DOWN A SLOPED RAMP AND INTO THE WATER OF THE LOCK AS THE DOORS CLOSE BEHIND IT...



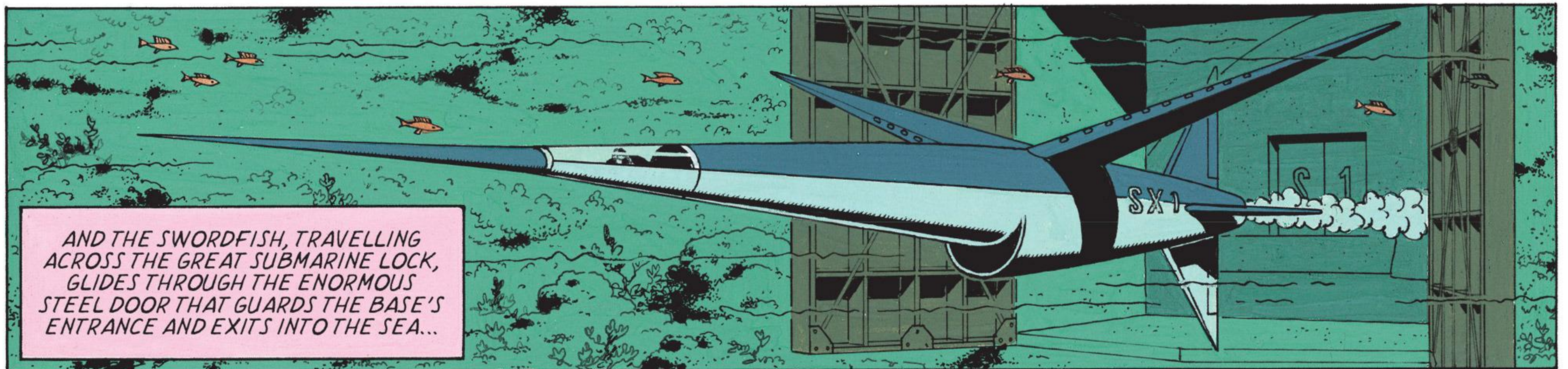
THE PROFESSOR TAKES CHARGE OF THE MANOEUVRE...

Ready on the pumps!



...AND WATER COMES GUSHING IN TO QUICKLY FILL THE LOCK.

Hello! Blake ... is everything all right? Pressure? Water-tightness?... Perfect! Get ready, I'm opening the outer door...



AND THE SWORDFISH, TRAVELLING ACROSS THE GREAT SUBMARINE LOCK, GLIDES THROUGH THE ENORMOUS STEEL DOOR THAT GUARDS THE BASE'S ENTRANCE AND EXITS INTO THE SEA...



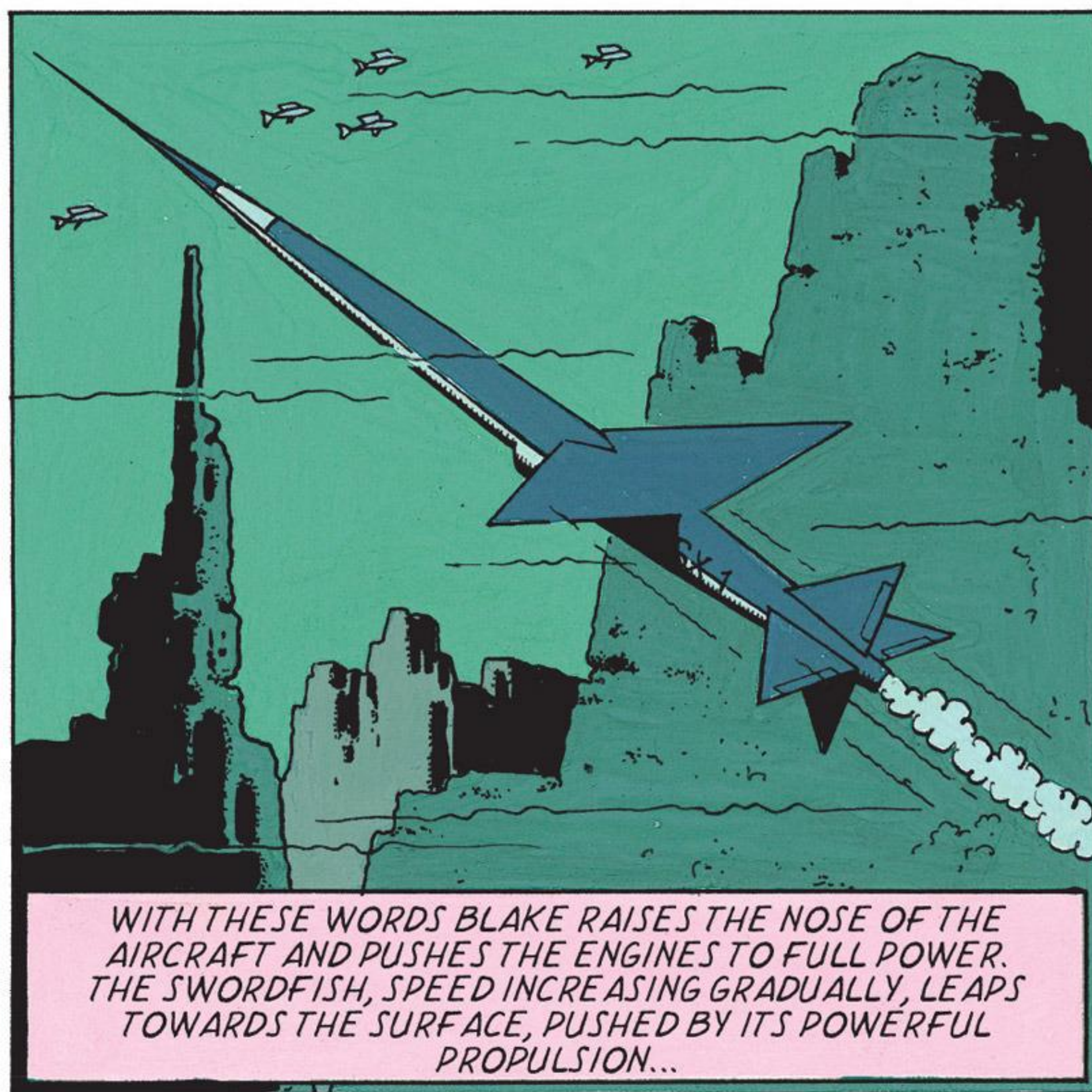
CAREFULLY NEGOTIATING THE MINEFIELD OUTSIDE, BLAKE HEADS OUT TOWARDS OPEN WATERS, ATTEMPTING TO PINPOINT THE LOCATION OF ENEMY VESSELS WITH HIS DETECTION SYSTEMS...



Hello! Francis? Good news! Repairs on the SX2 are over. I'm on my way!... Oh, don't forget to shut off the oxygen tank when you emerge... And, more importantly, open the air intake!



Understood, old chap!... Ah, there's just the spot I was looking for. Well, Mortimer, goodbye, and God save England!!!



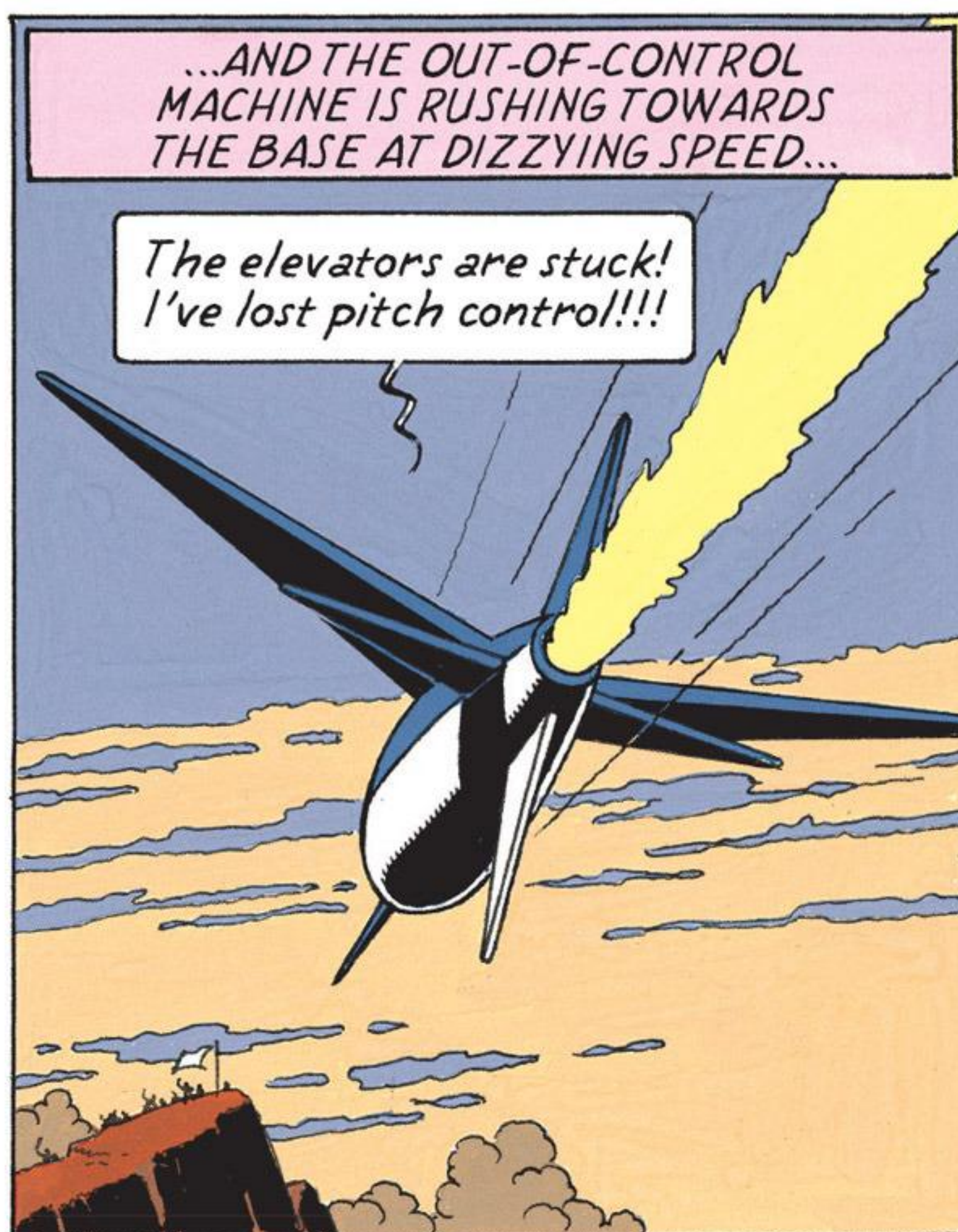
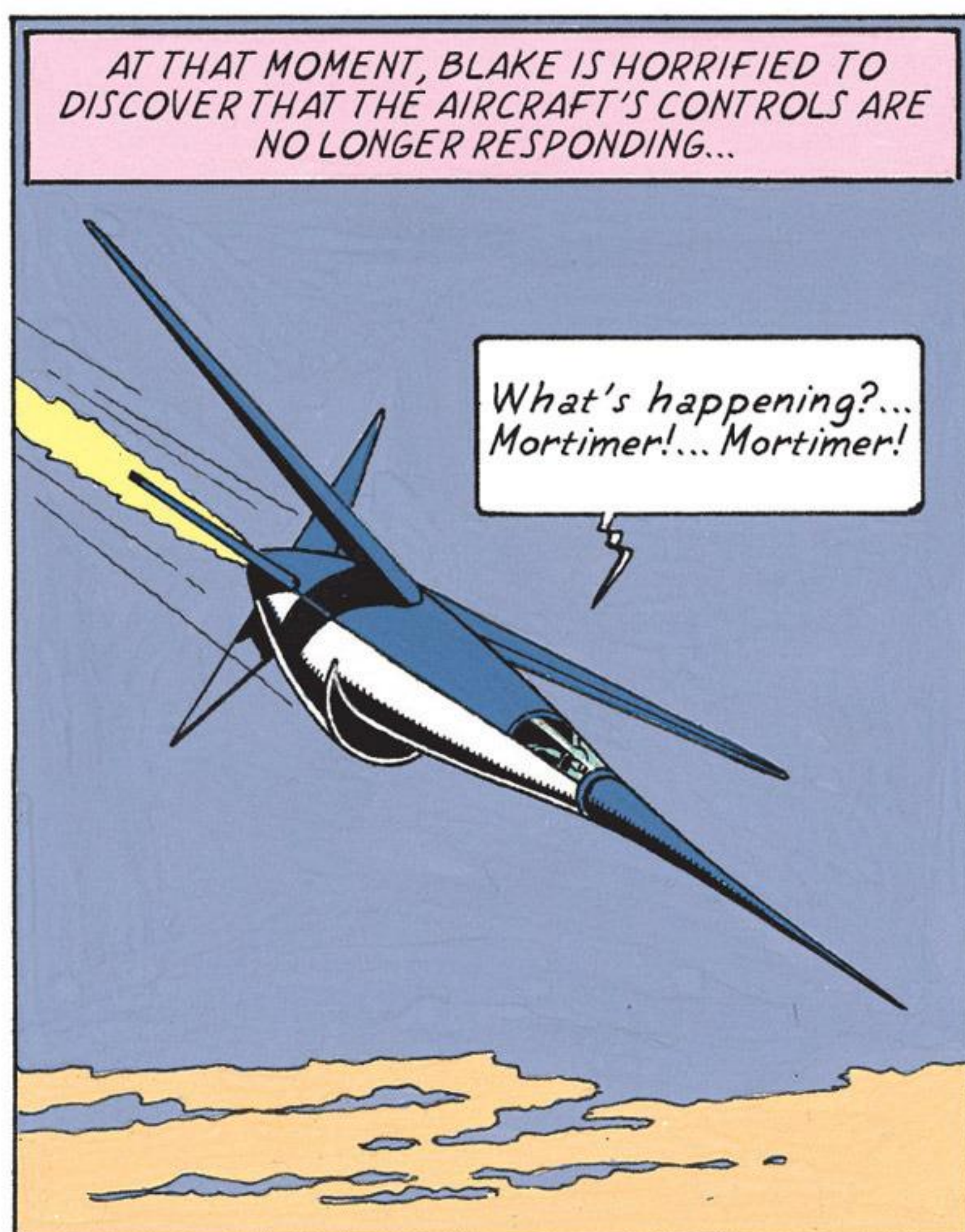
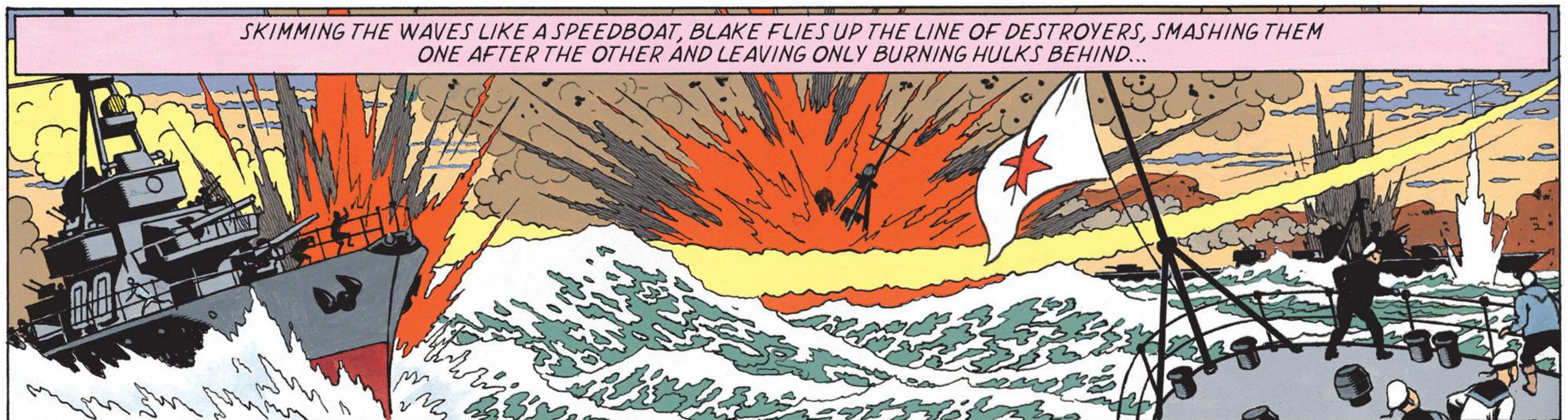
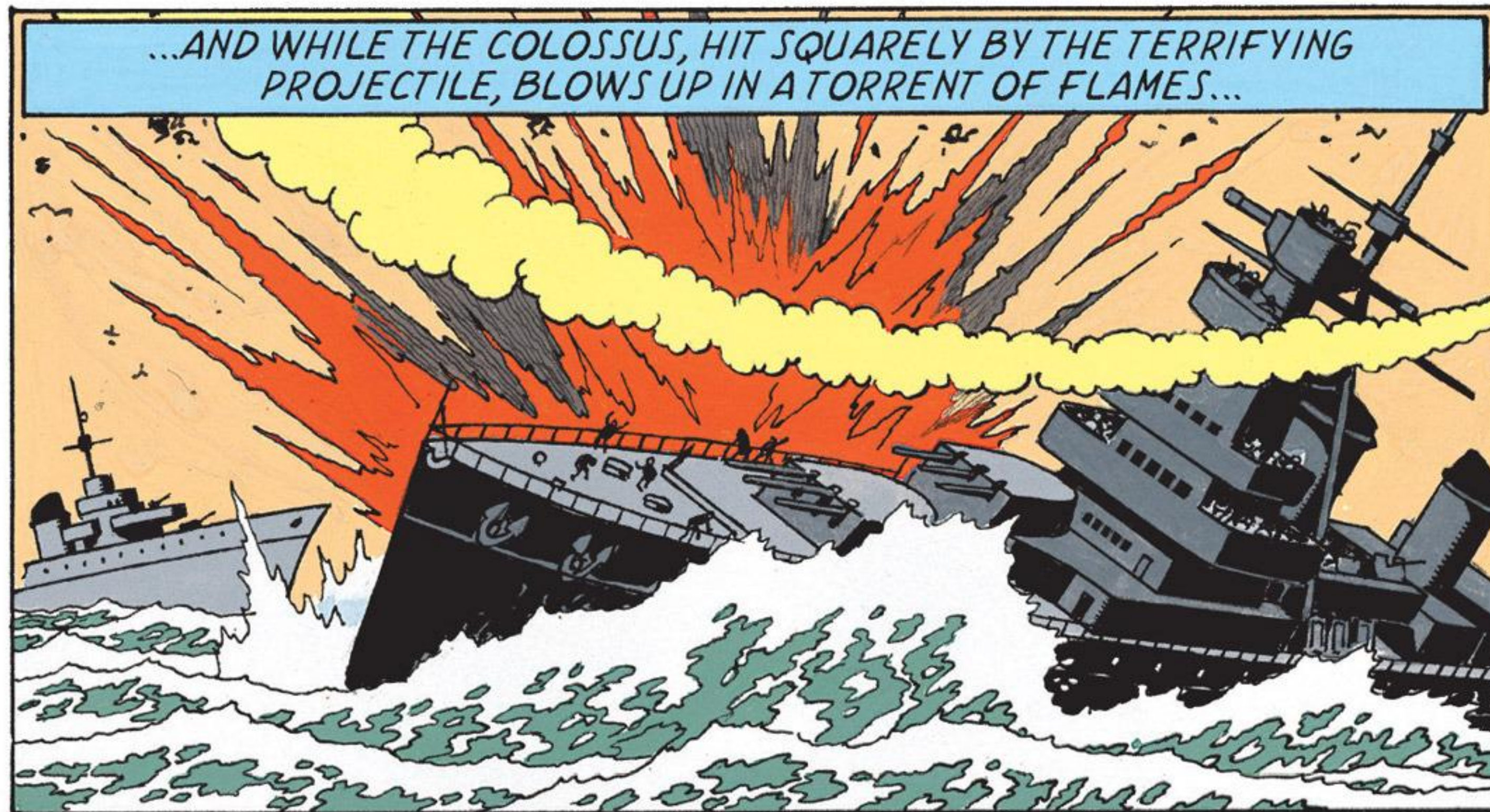
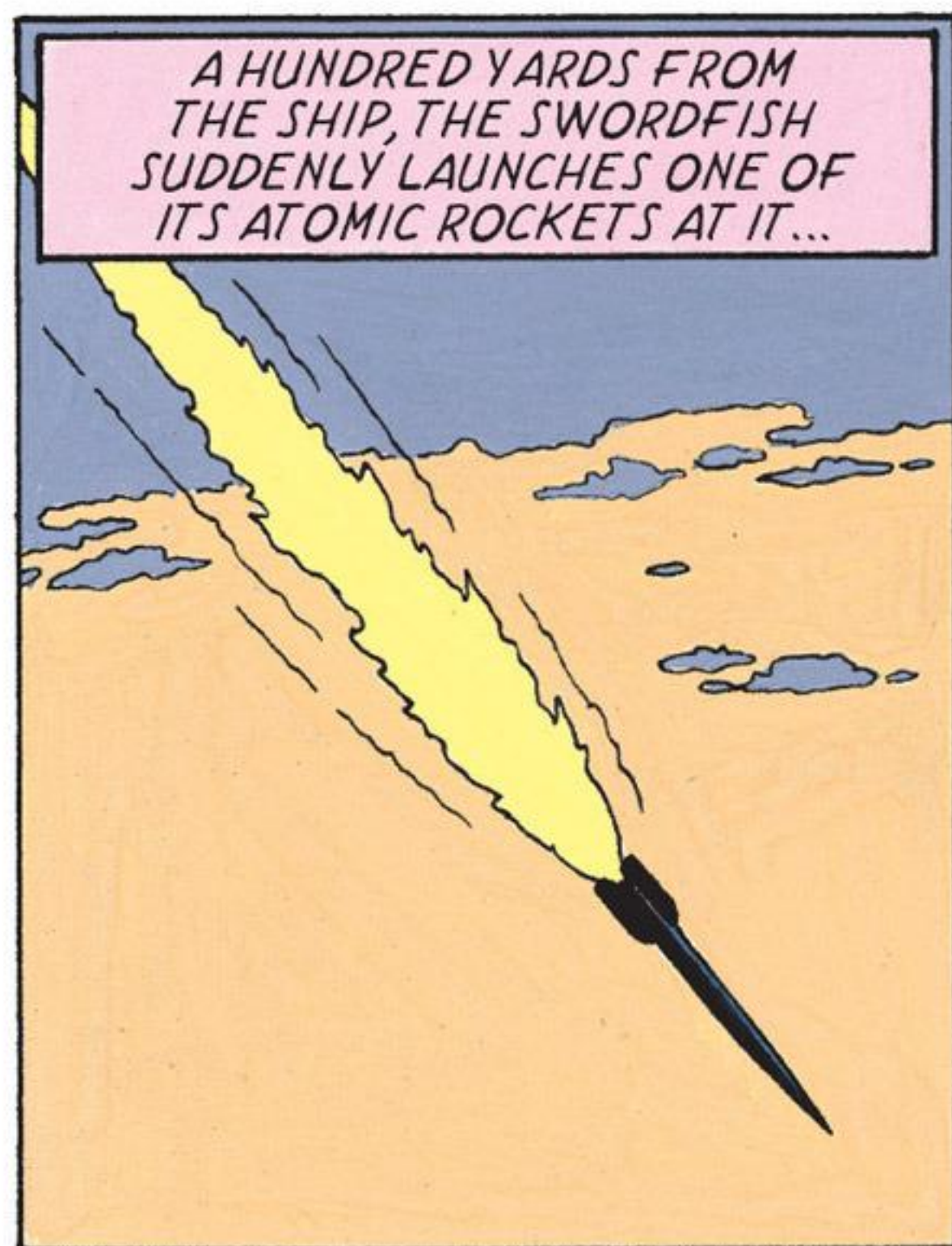
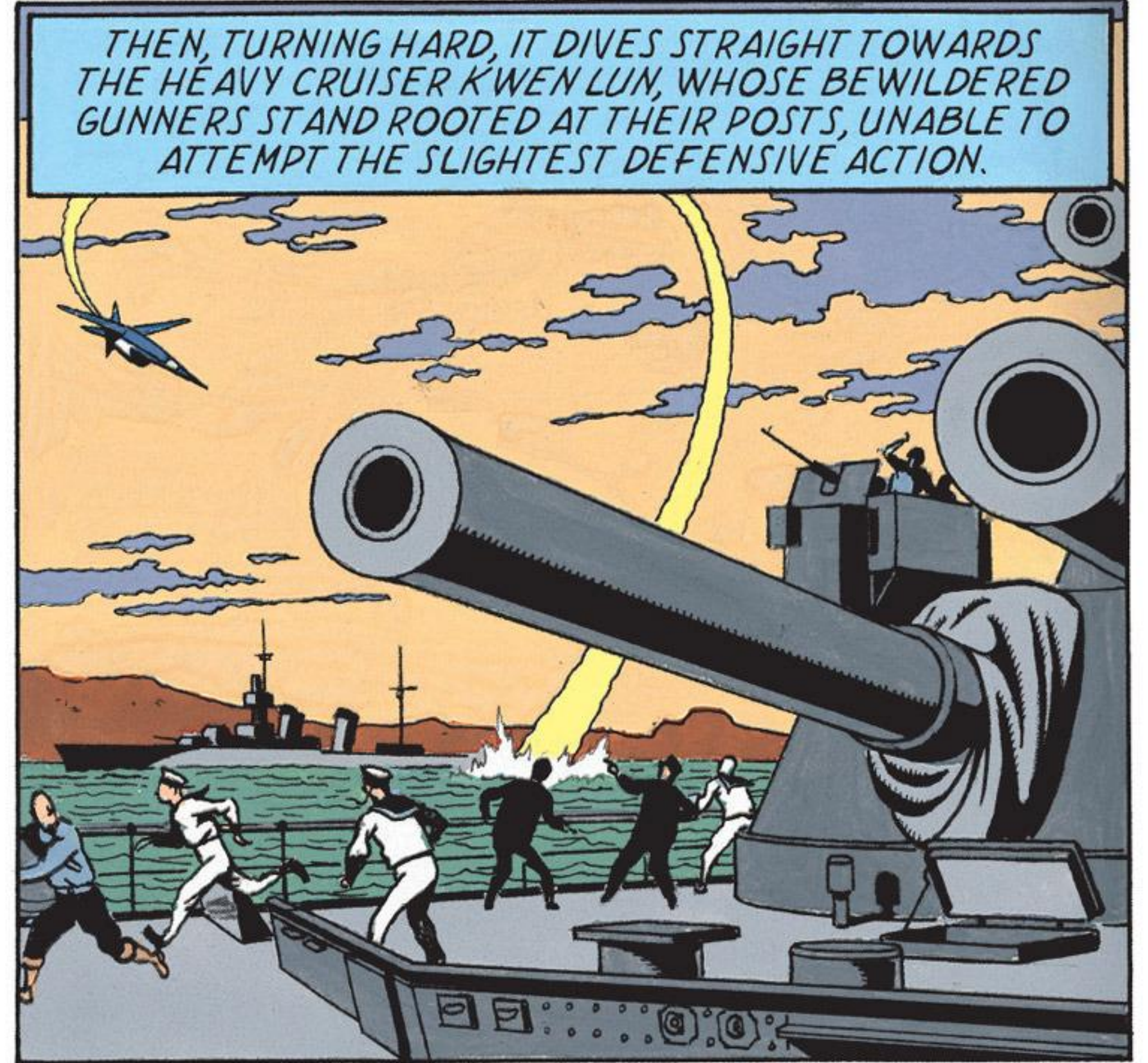
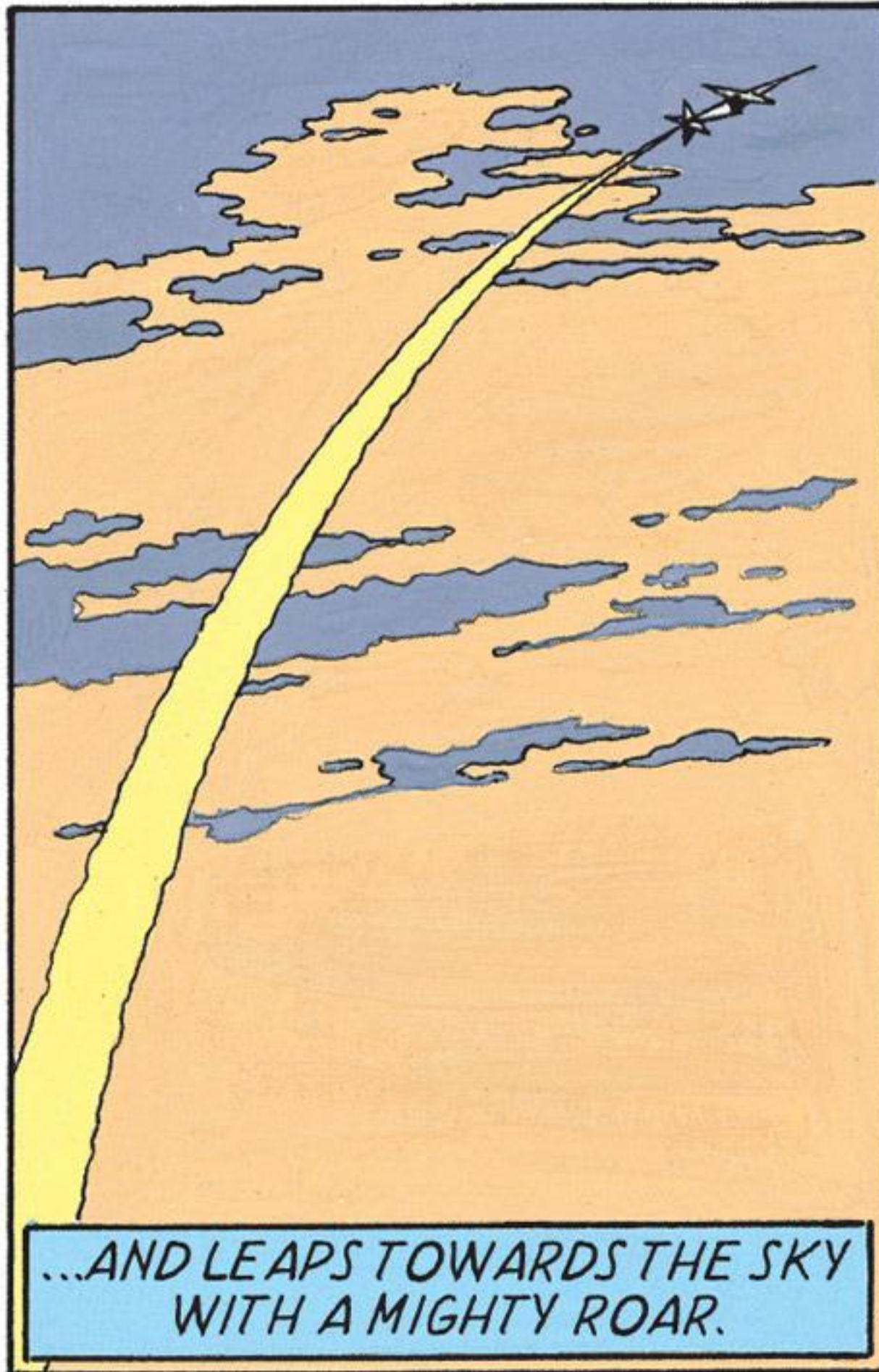
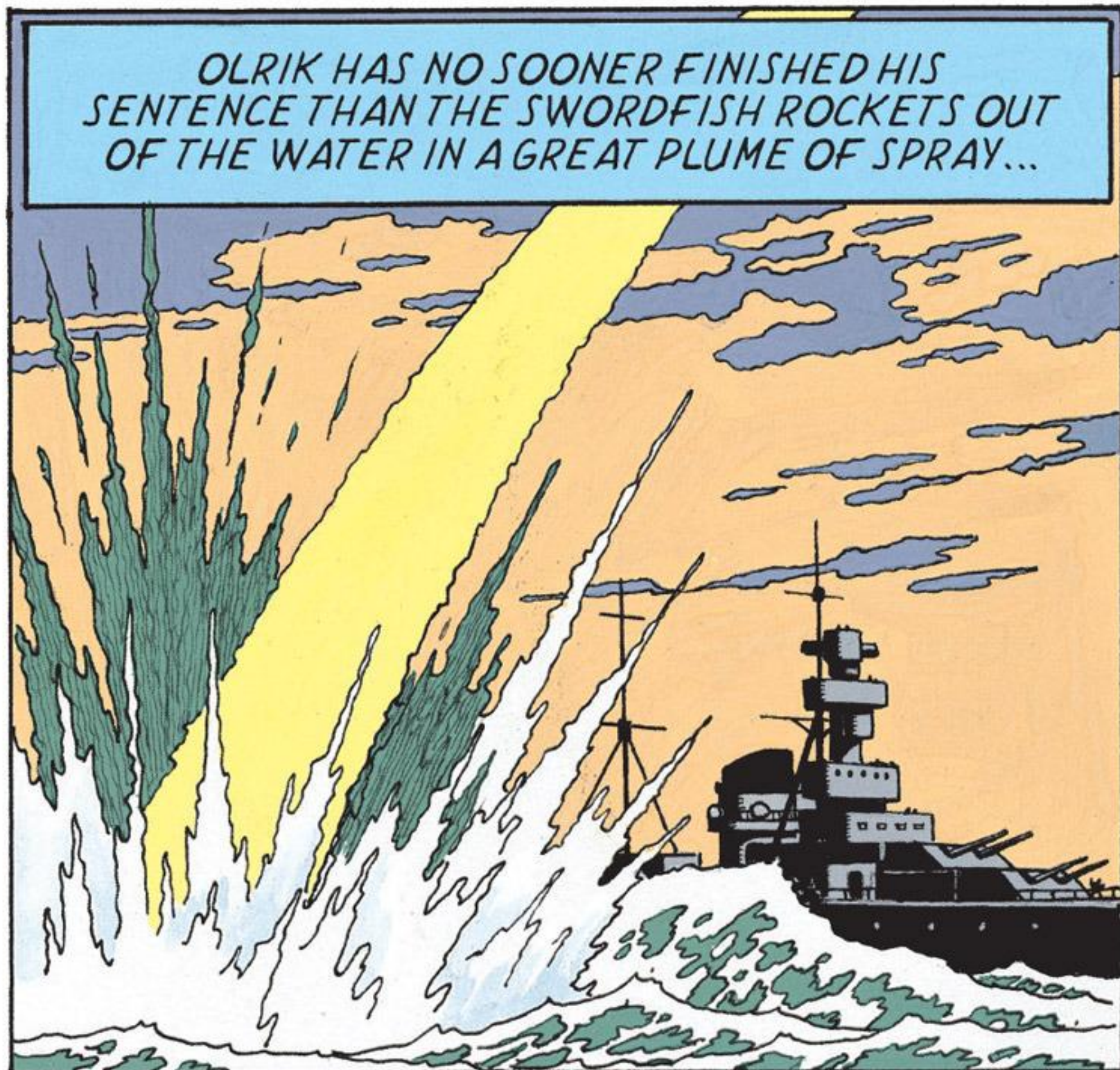
WITH THESE WORDS BLAKE RAISES THE NOSE OF THE AIRCRAFT AND PUSHES THE ENGINES TO FULL POWER. THE SWORDFISH, SPEED INCREASING GRADUALLY, LEAPS TOWARDS THE SURFACE, PUSHED BY ITS POWERFUL PROPULSION...

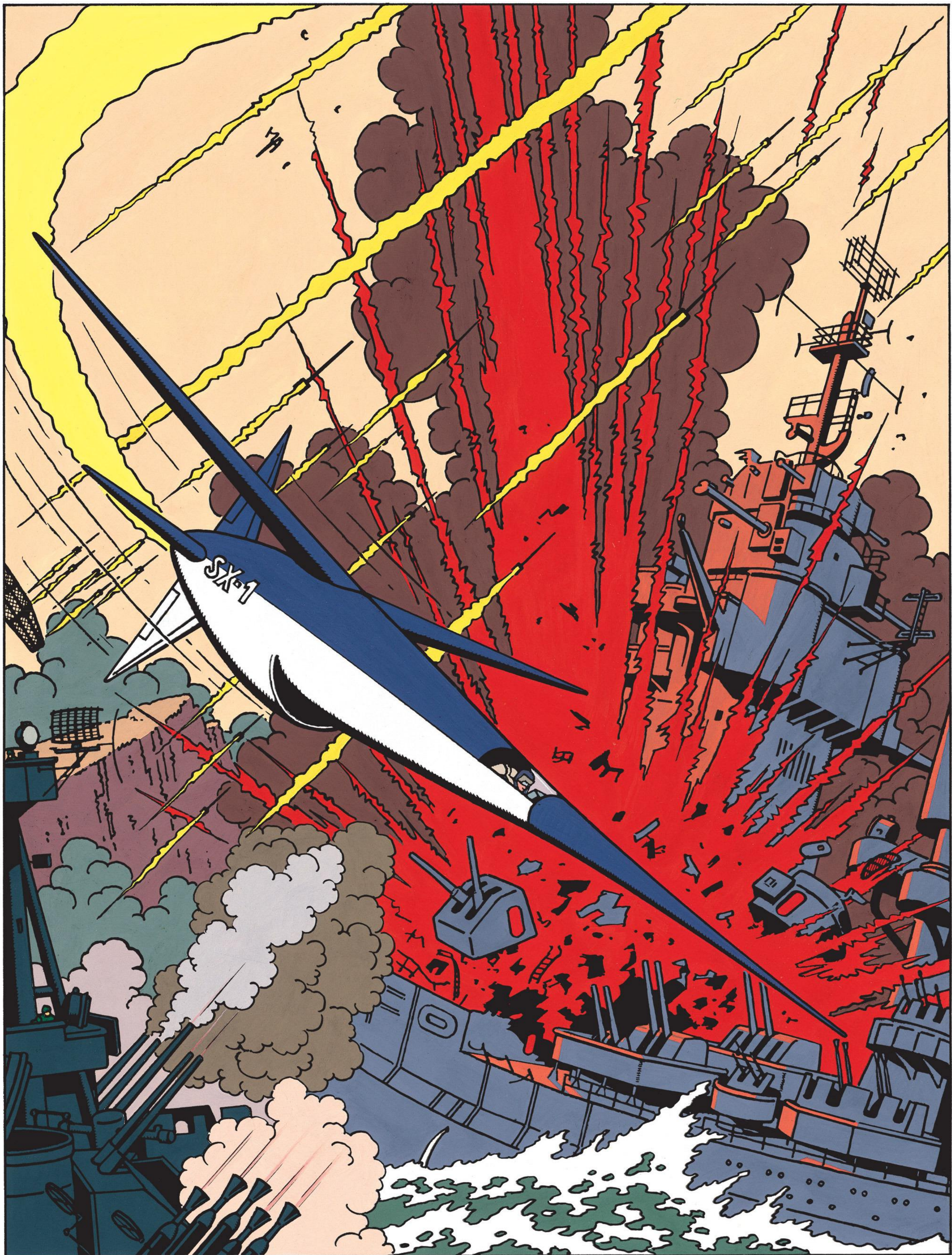


AT THAT MOMENT, THE IMPERIAL FLAG IS RAISED OVER THE BASE.

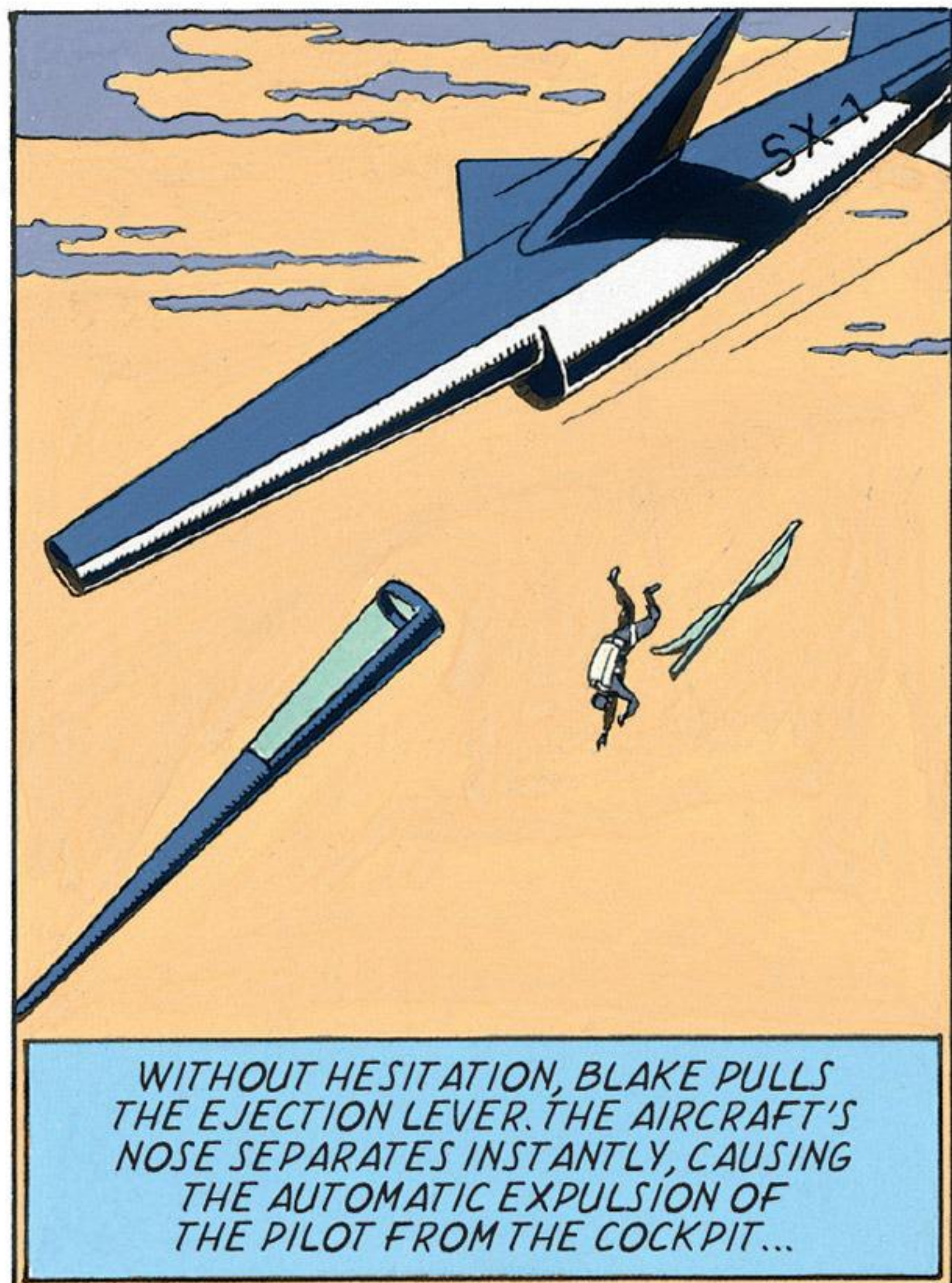


Well, gentlemen? Did I not keep my word?





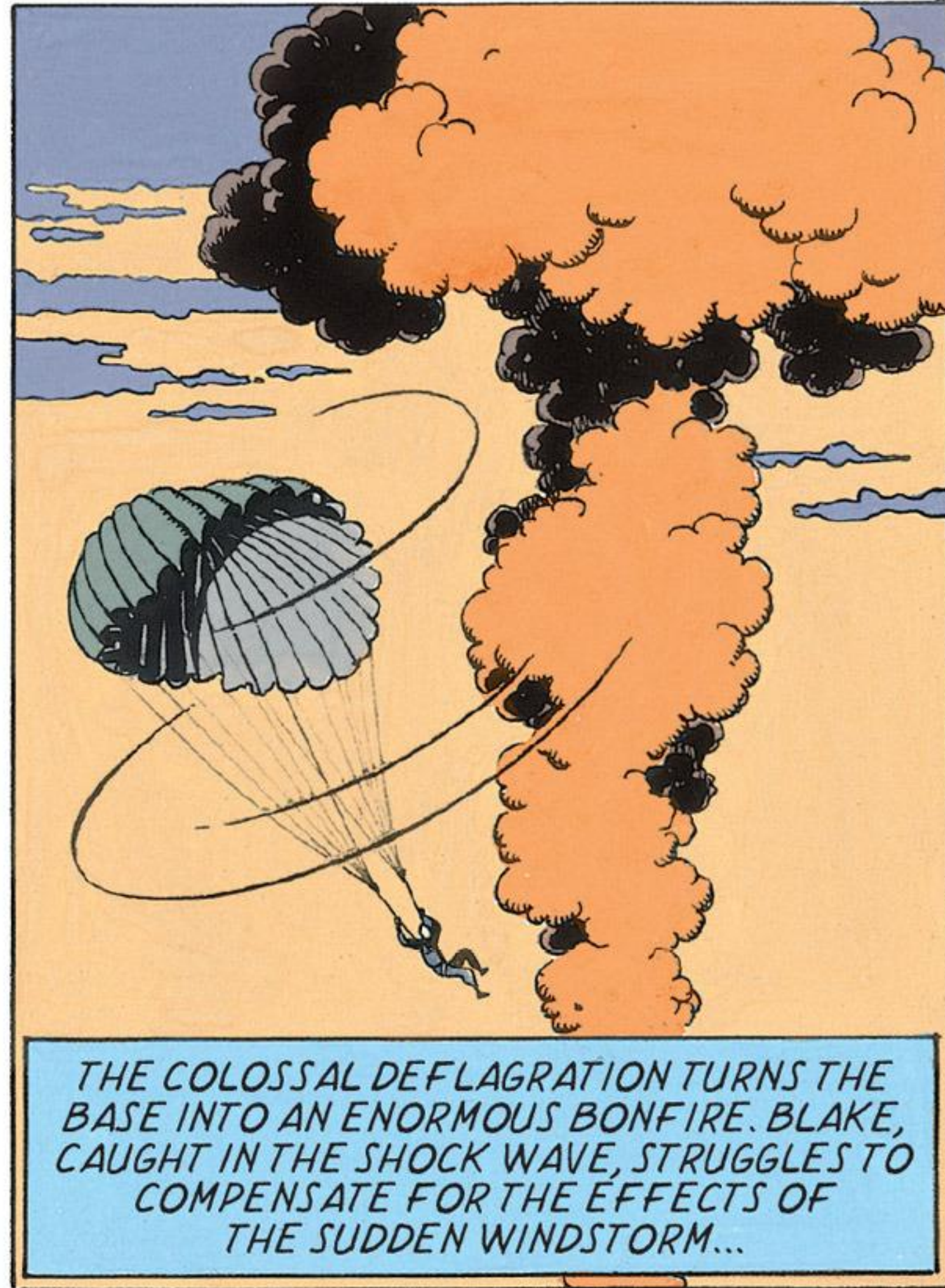
SKIMMING THE WAVES LIKE A SPEEDBOAT, THE SWORDFISH FLIES UP THE LINE OF DESTROYERS, SMASHING THEM ONE AFTER THE OTHER AND LEAVING ONLY BURNING HULKS BEHIND...



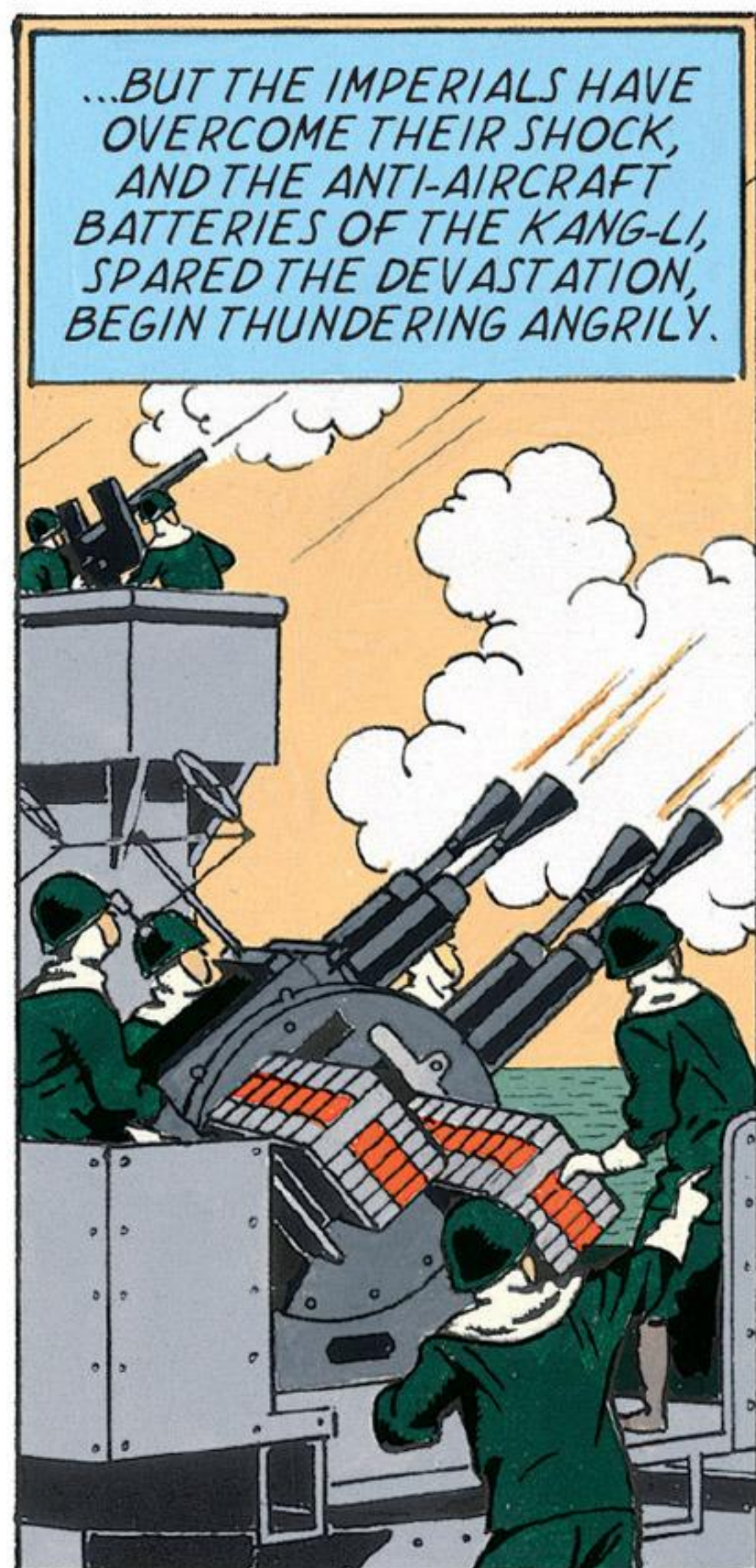
WITHOUT HESITATION, BLAKE PULLS THE EJECTION LEVER. THE AIRCRAFT'S NOSE SEPARATES INSTANTLY, CAUSING THE AUTOMATIC EXPULSION OF THE PILOT FROM THE COCKPIT...



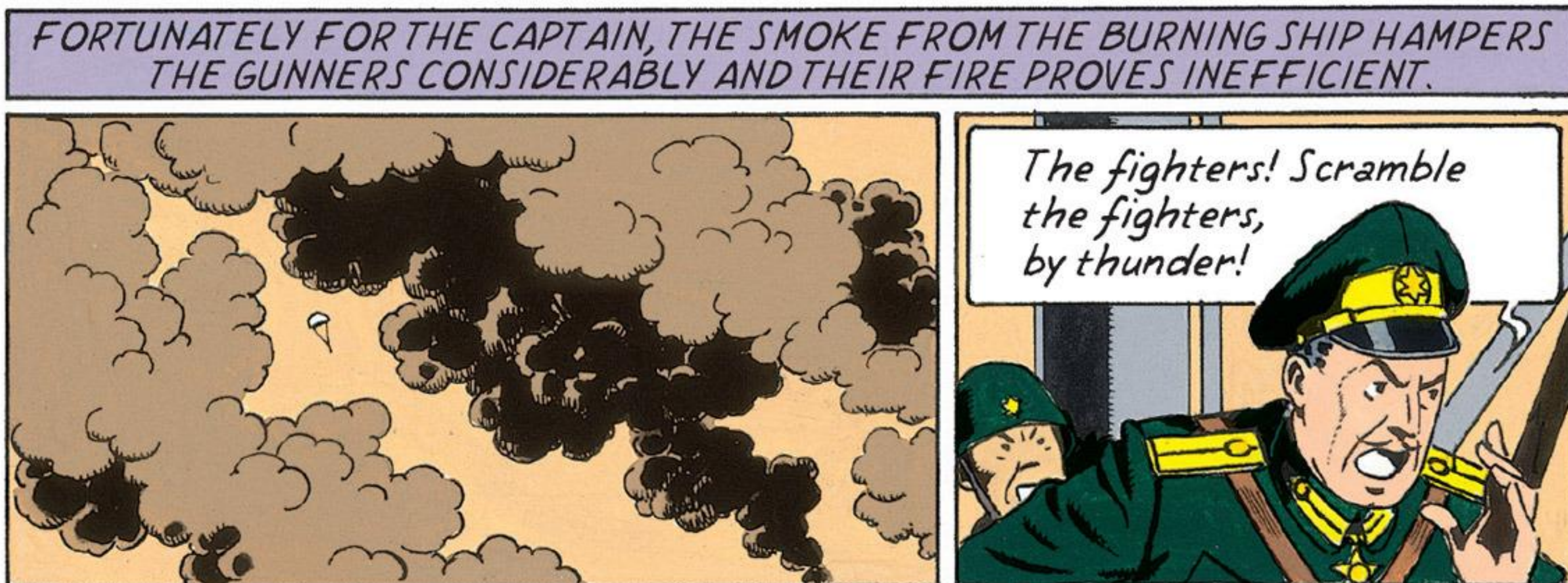
JUST IN TIME... FIVE SECONDS LATER, THE ABANDONED SX-1 ENDS ITS COURSE AGAINST THE TOP OF THE BASE, EXPLODING ALONG WITH ITS REMAINING ATOMIC ROCKETS AND, IN A BLINDING FLASH, WIPING OUT THE TROOPS SCATTERED ACROSS THE ROCK'S SURFACE.



THE COLOSSAL DEFLAGRATION TURNS THE BASE INTO AN ENORMOUS BONFIRE. BLAKE, CAUGHT IN THE SHOCK WAVE, STRUGGLES TO COMPENSATE FOR THE EFFECTS OF THE SUDDEN WINDSTORM...

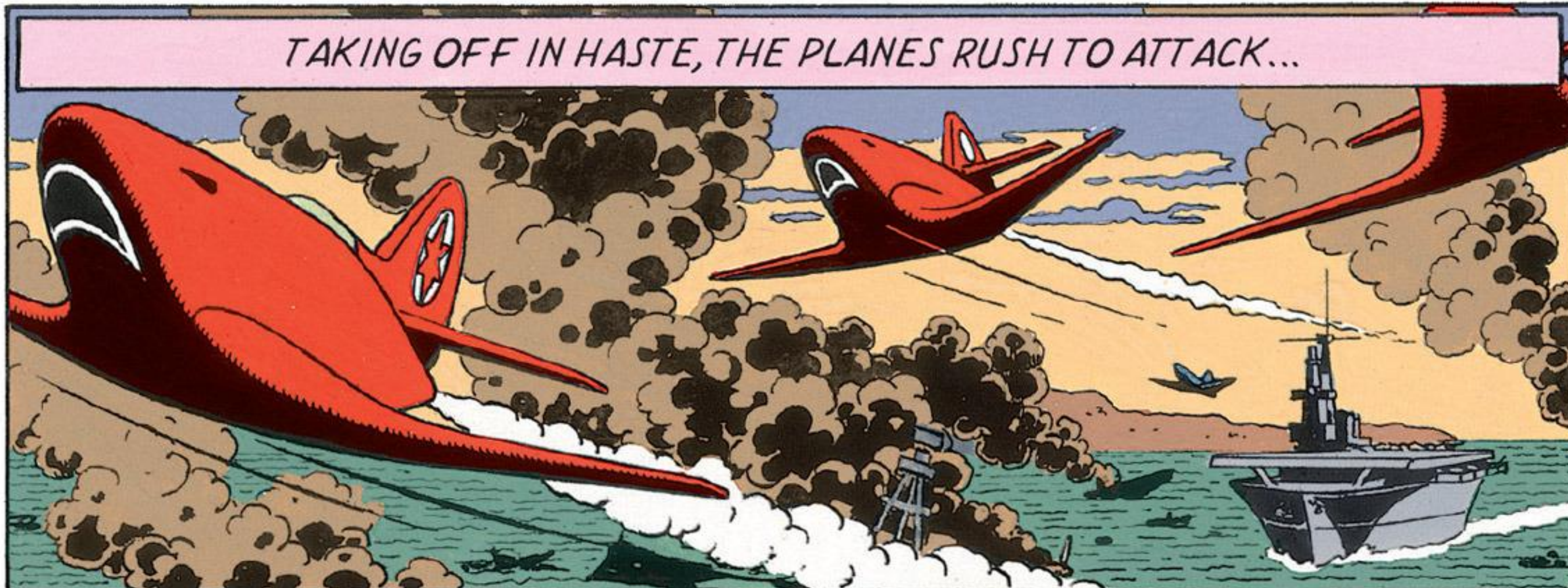


...BUT THE IMPERIALS HAVE OVERCOME THEIR SHOCK, AND THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERIES OF THE KANG-LI, SPARED THE DEVASTATION, BEGIN THUNDERING ANGRILY.



FORTUNATELY FOR THE CAPTAIN, THE SMOKE FROM THE BURNING SHIP HAMPERS THE GUNNERS CONSIDERABLY AND THEIR FIRE PROVES INEFFICIENT.

The fighters! Scramble the fighters, by thunder!



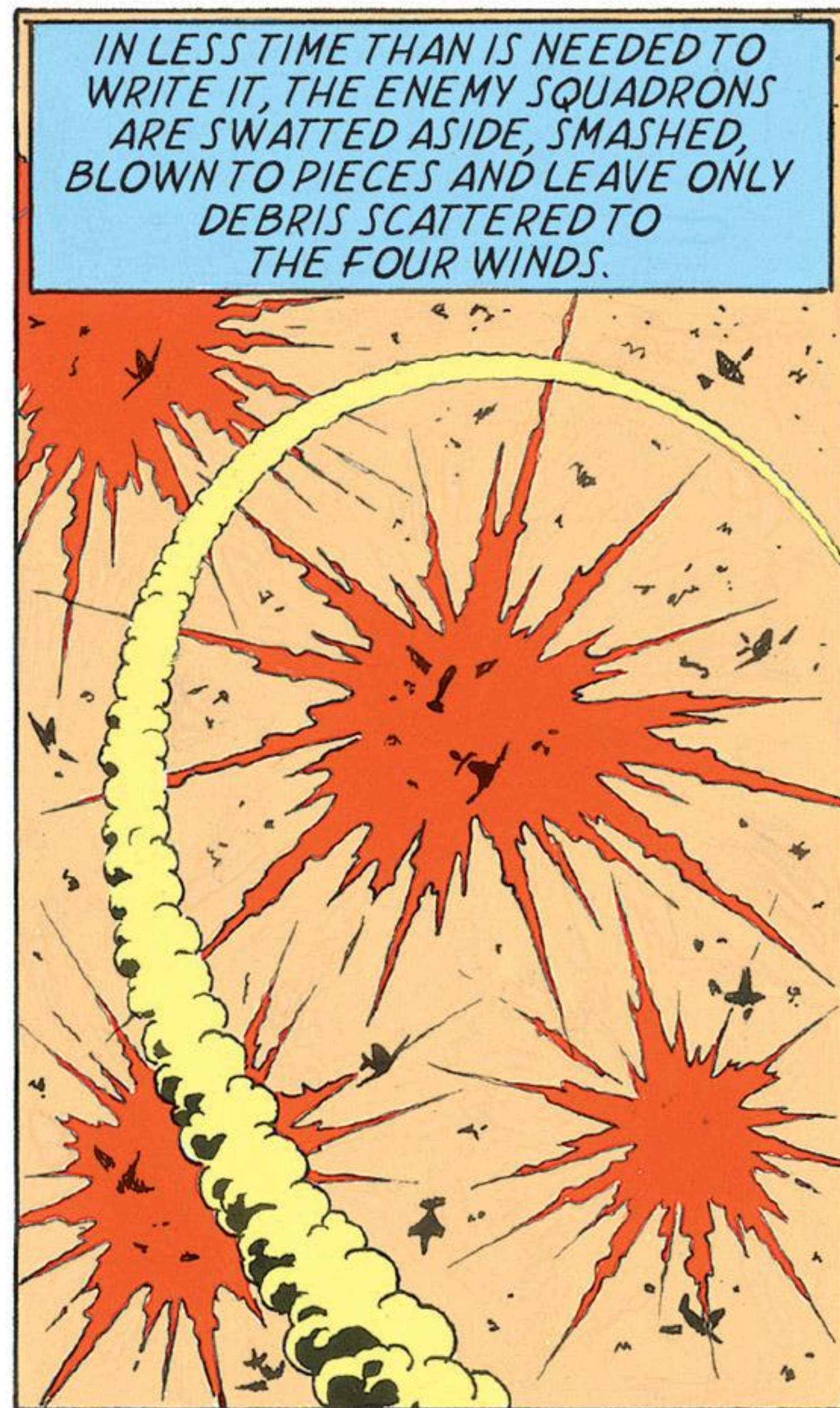
TAKING OFF IN HASTE, THE PLANES RUSH TO ATTACK...



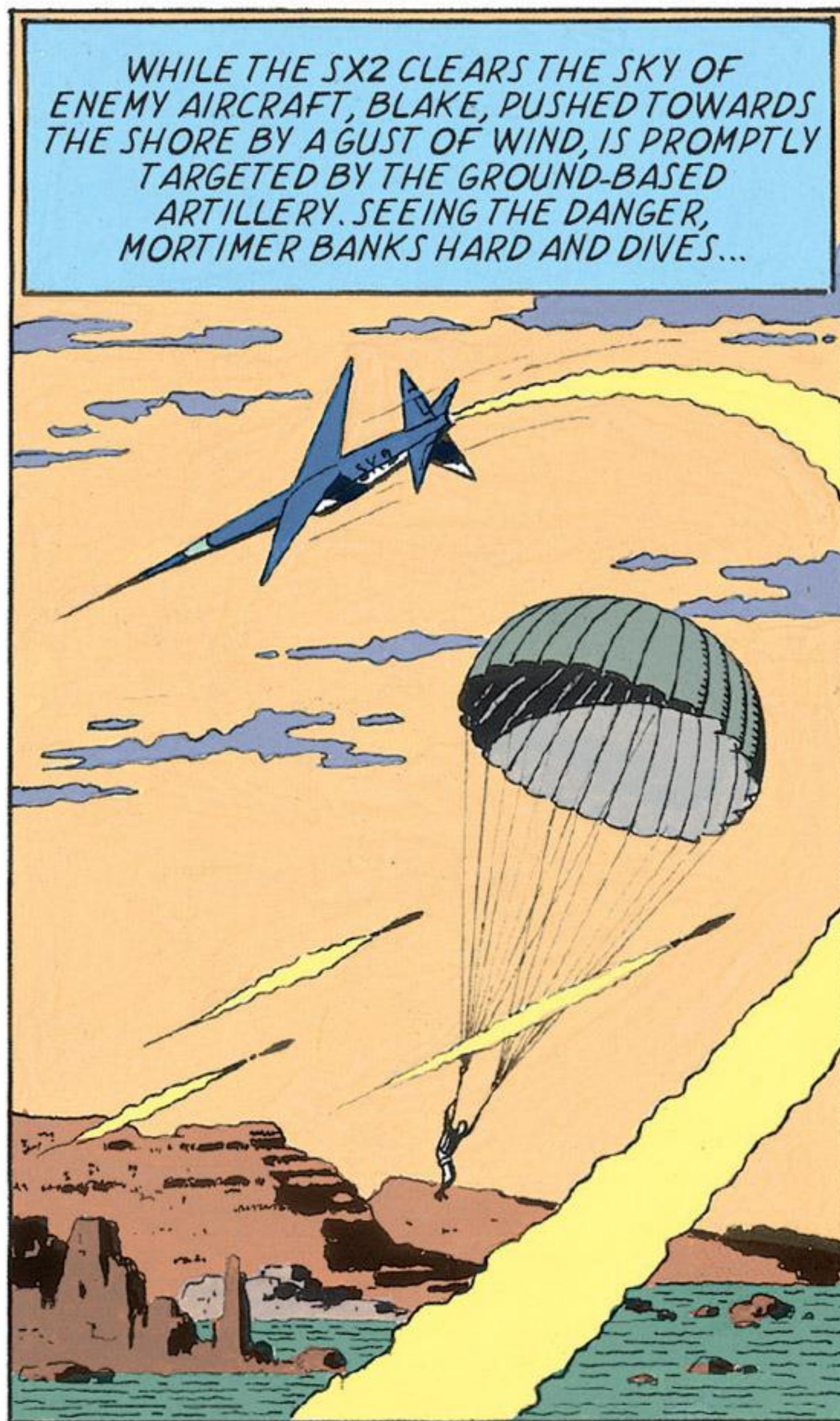
...BUT AT THAT MOMENT THE SX-2, RISING UP FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN, PIERCES THE SURFACE OF THE WATER...



...AND, LEAVING A TRAIL OF FIRE BEHIND, SOARS UP INTO THE SKY TO MEET THE FIGHTERS.



IN LESS TIME THAN IS NEEDED TO WRITE IT, THE ENEMY SQUADRONS ARE SWATTED ASIDE, SMASHED, BLOWN TO PIECES AND LEAVE ONLY DEBRIS SCATTERED TO THE FOUR WINDS.

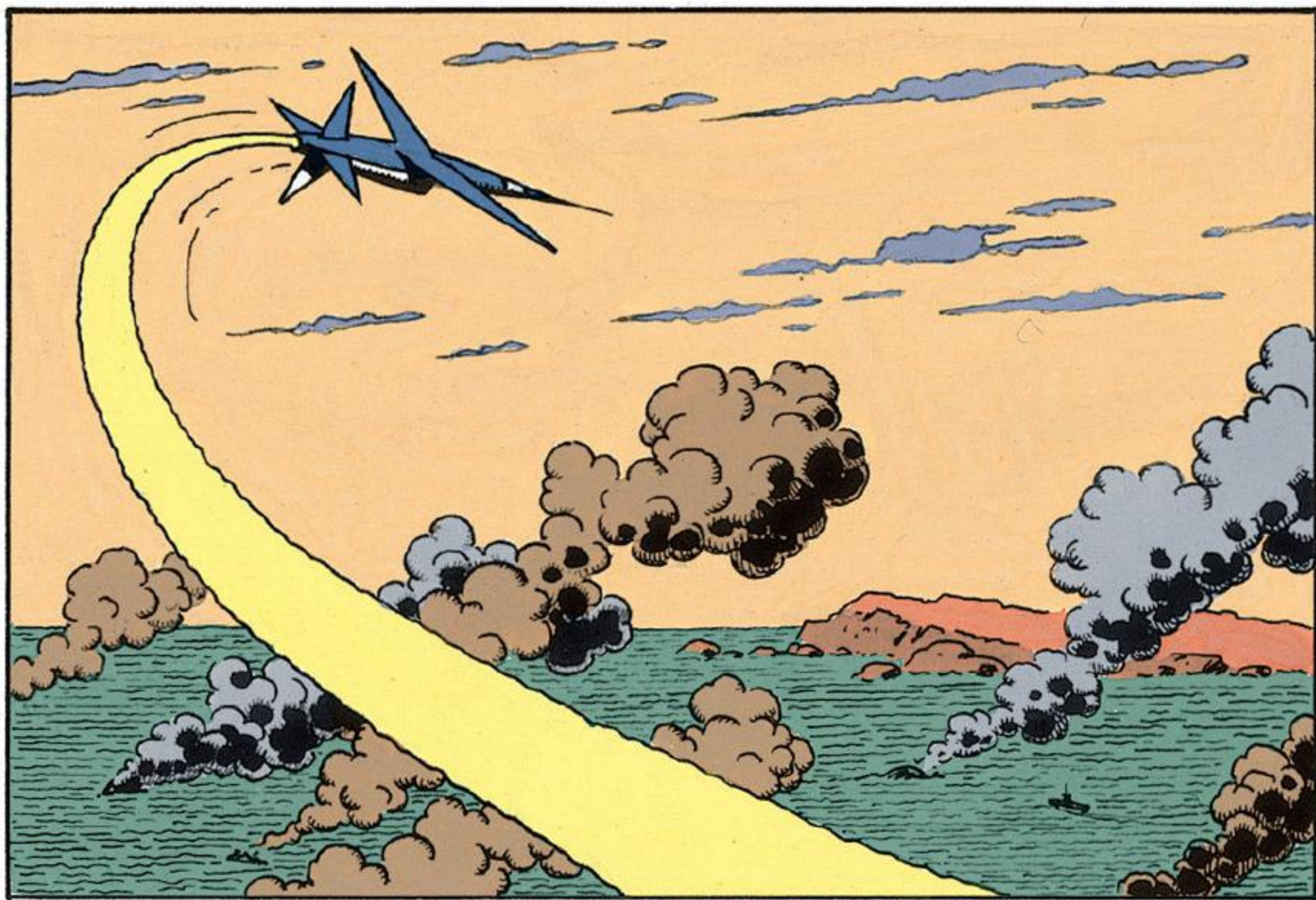
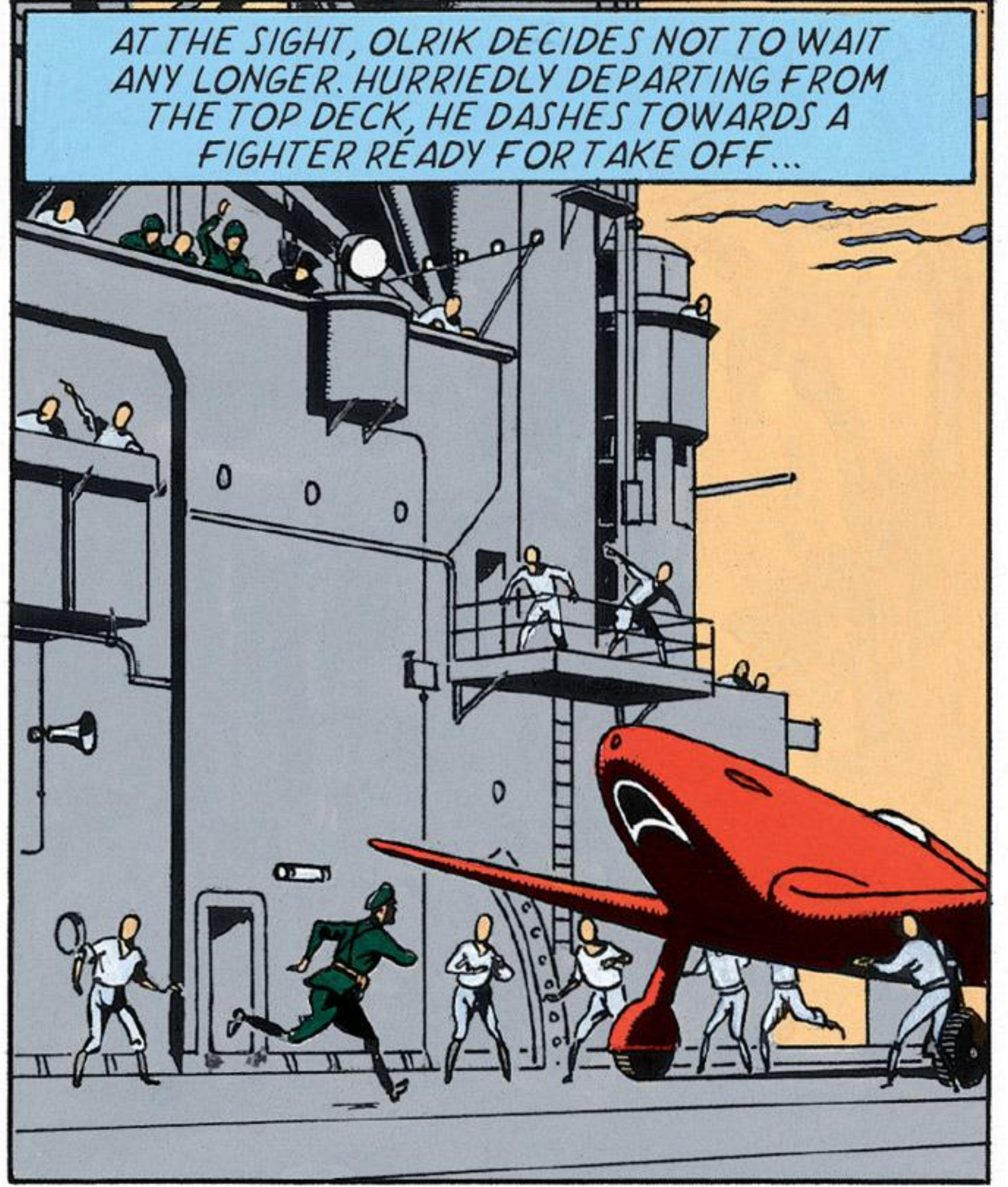
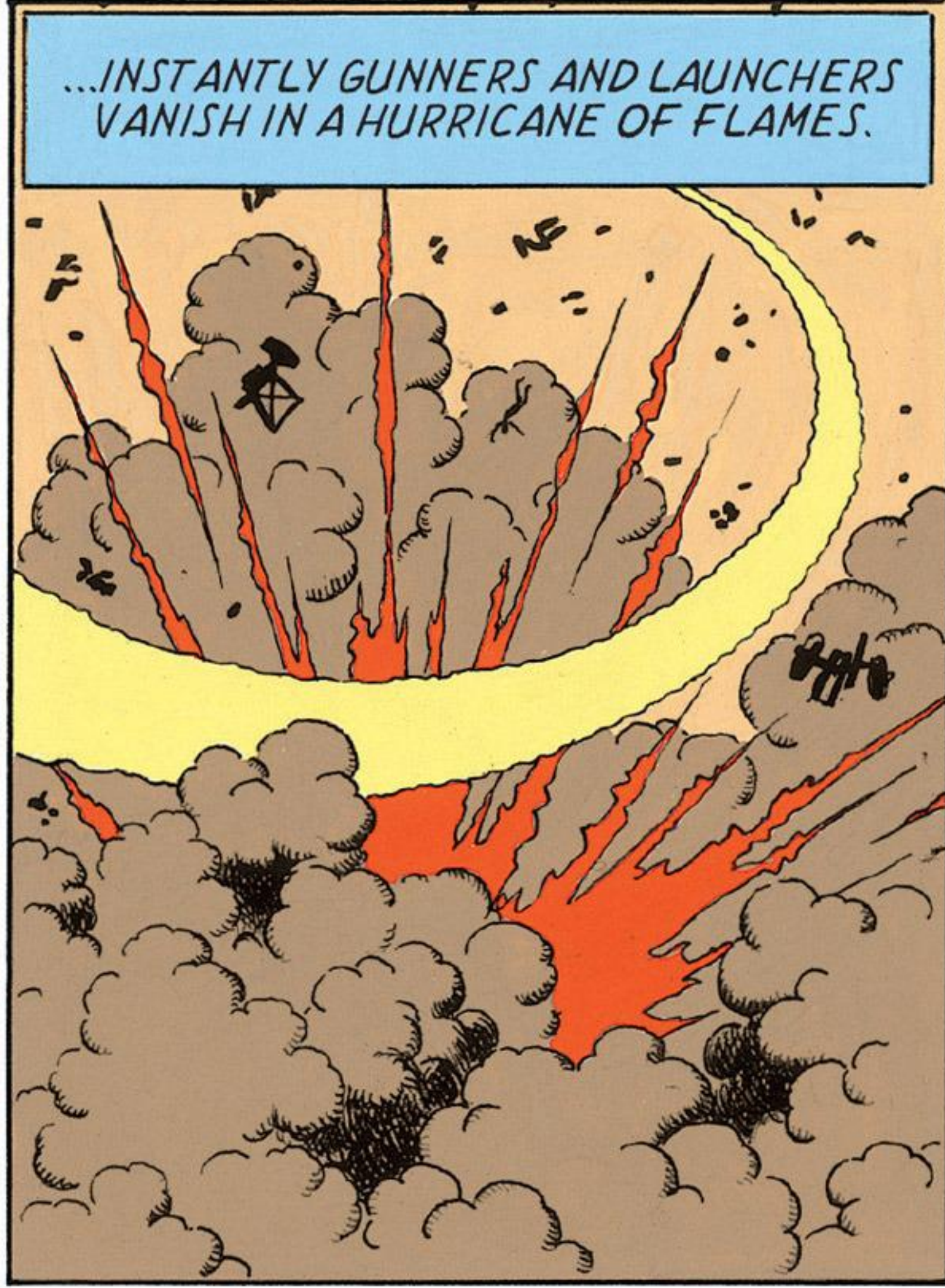
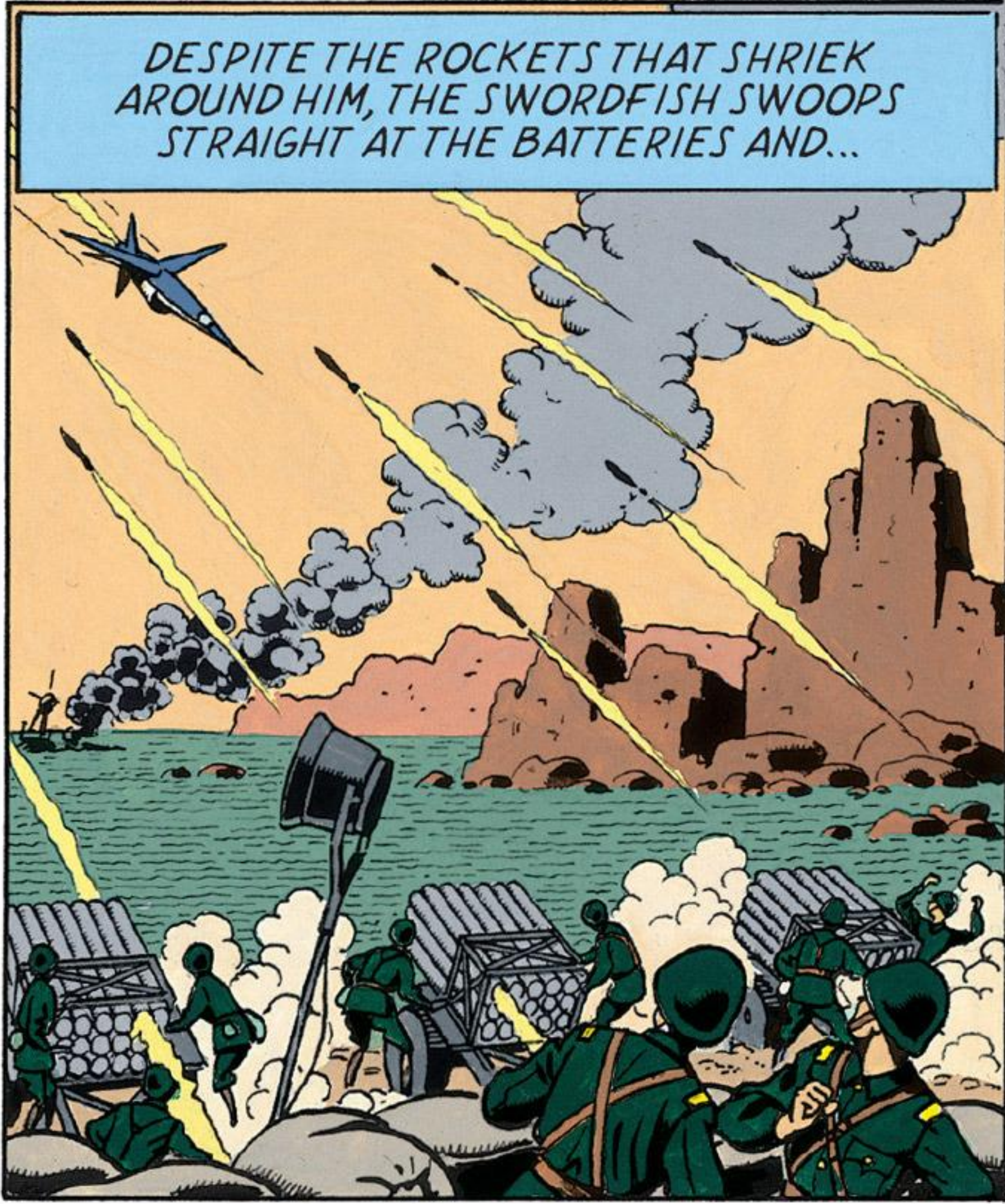


WHILE THE SX-2 CLEARS THE SKY OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT, BLAKE, PUSHED TOWARDS THE SHORE BY A GUST OF WIND, IS PROMPTLY TARGETED BY THE GROUND-BASED ARTILLERY. SEEING THE DANGER, MORTIMER BANKS HARD AND DIVES...

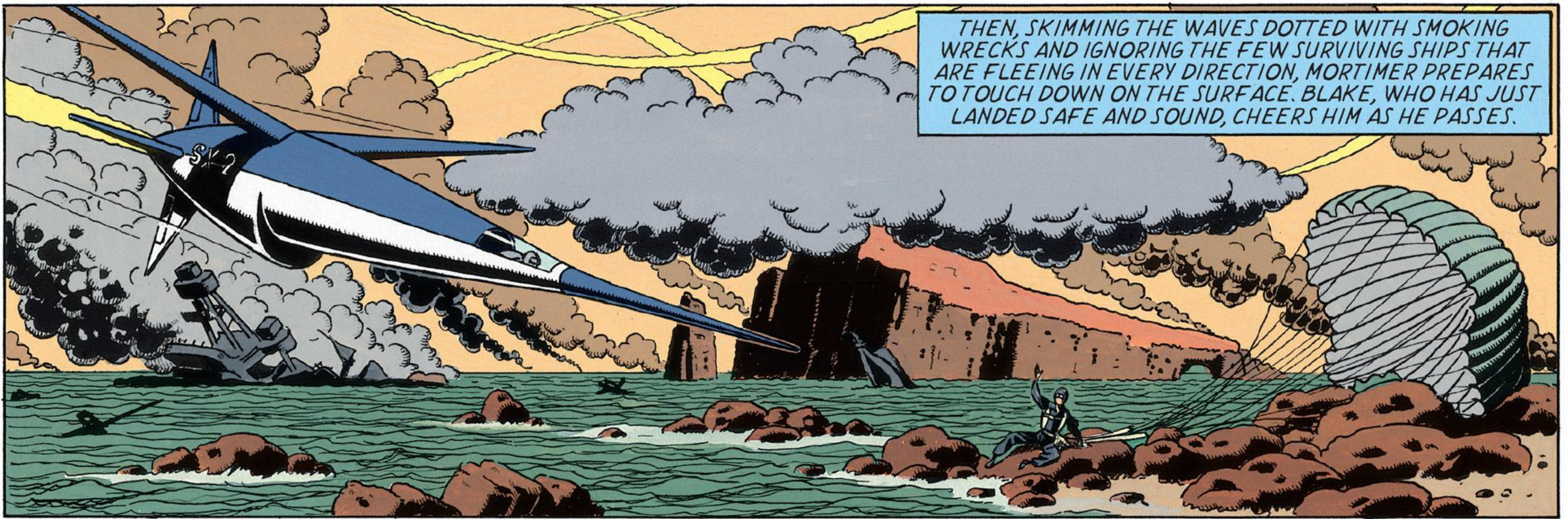
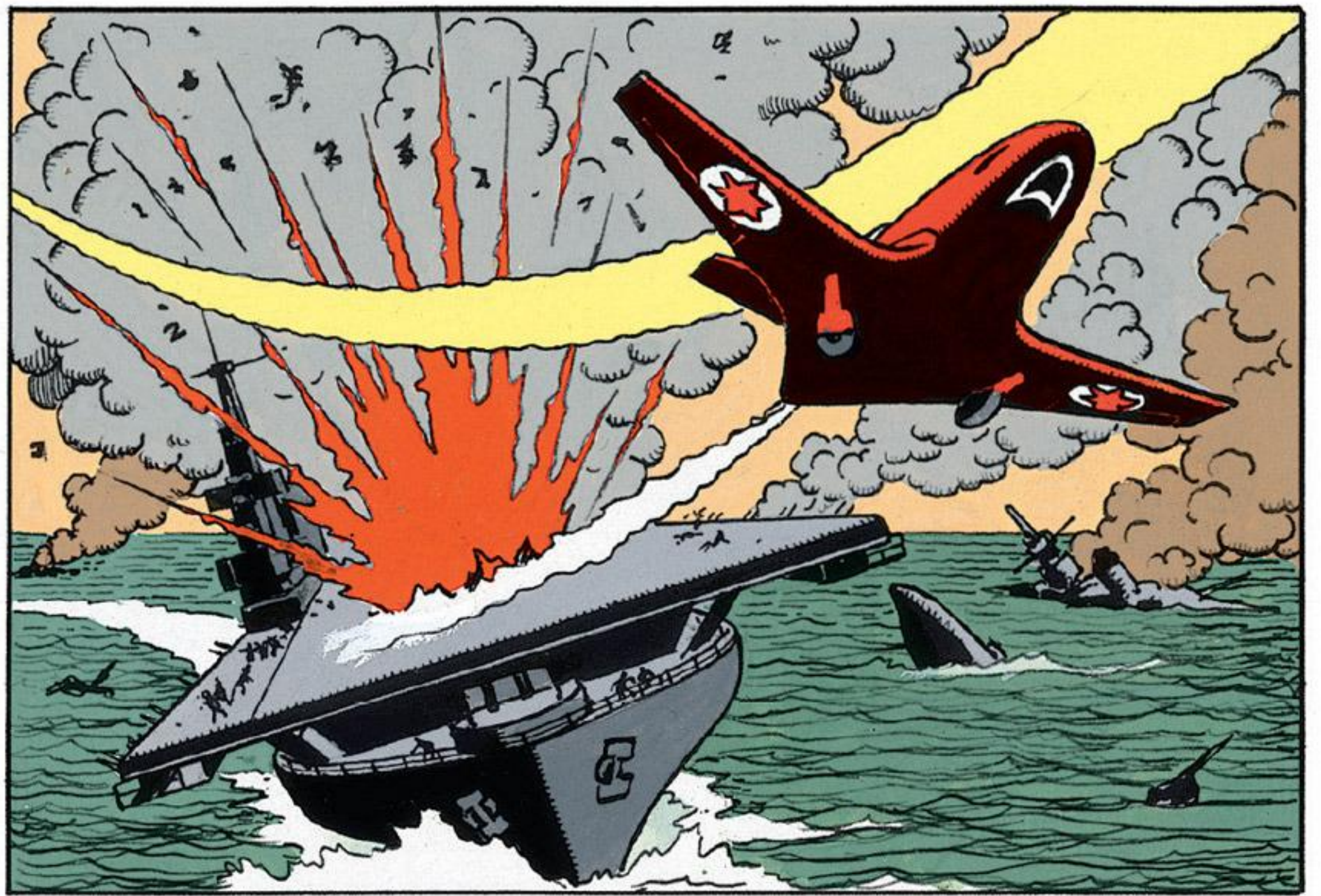


FROM THE OBSERVATION DECK OF THE KANG-HI, OLRİK, LIVID WITH RAGE AND POWERLESS, FOLLOWS THE EVOLUTIONS OF THAT STRANGE AND TERRIBLE OPPONENT.

By the devil!... If they miss it, we're done for!



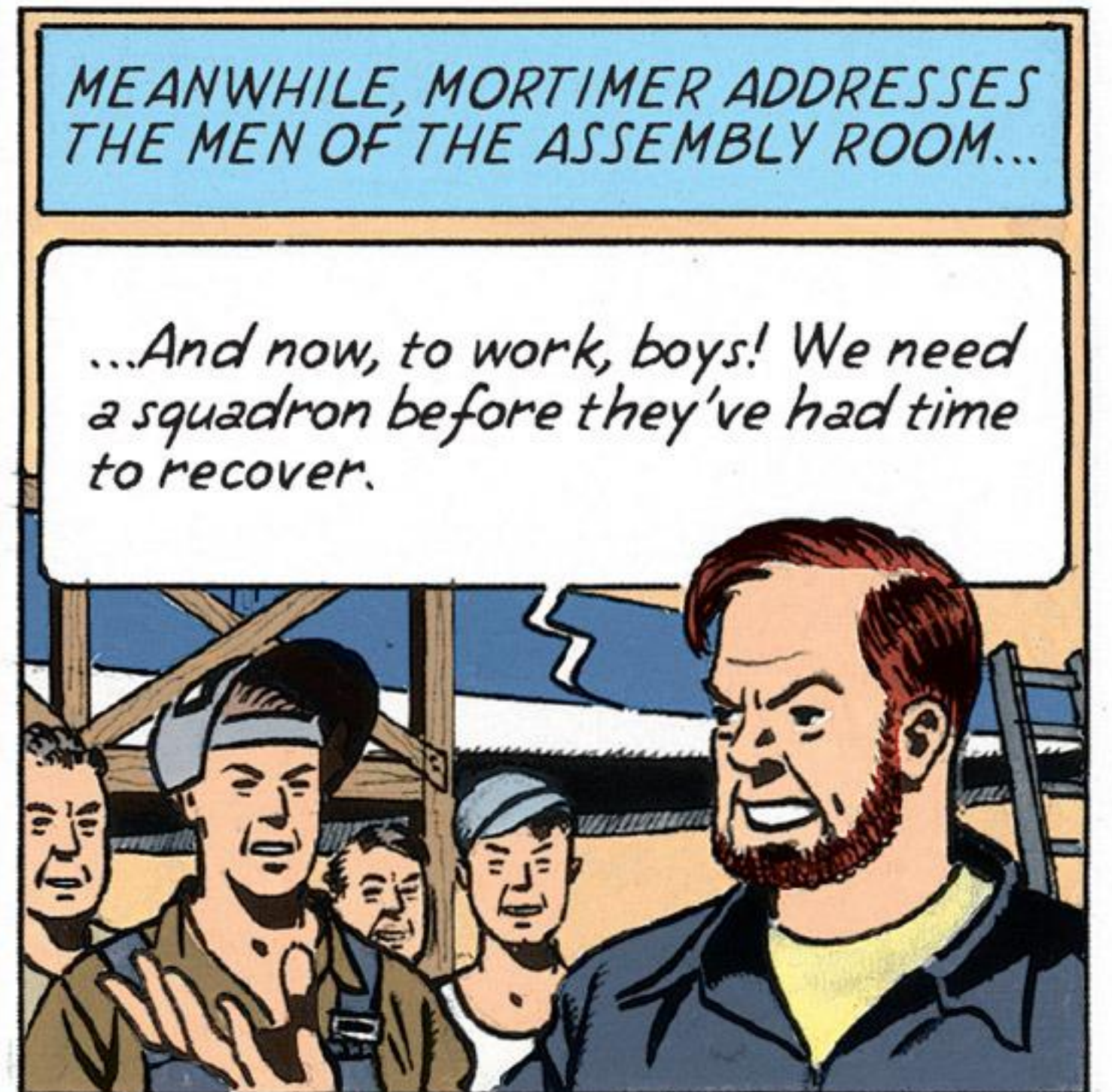
NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON!... ALREADY THE SX2 IS STARTING A NEW ATTACK RUN. DIVING FROM ON HIGH TOWARDS HIS LAST OPPONENT, MORTIMER LAUNCHES A VOLLEY OF ATOMIC ROCKETS STRAIGHT AT THE FLIGHT DECK. GUTTED, THE KANG-HI BLOWS UP JUST AS OLRİK LEAVES THE PLATFORM. THE PLANE IS MERCILESSLY BUFFETED BY THE EXPLOSION, BUT MANAGES TO RECOVER AND DISAPPEARS INTO THE SMOKE.



TODAY, THE IMPERIAL OPPRESSORS HAVE BEEN DEALT A CRUSHING BLOW THAT FORETELLS THEIR COMING DESTRUCTION. TWO PROTOTYPES OF A NEW AIRCRAFT CALLED THE SWORDFISH, BUILT IN A SECRET BASE IN THE SEA OF OMAN, HAVE JUST OBLITERATED...



...AN ENTIRE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS THAT COMPRISED AIR, LAND AND SEA UNITS. A POWERFUL SQUADRON OF THESE TERRIBLE MACHINES IS ABOUT TO GO INTO ACTION. FREE MEN OF THE WORLD, THE TIME OF LIBERATION HAS COME! FIGHT THE INVADER!!!

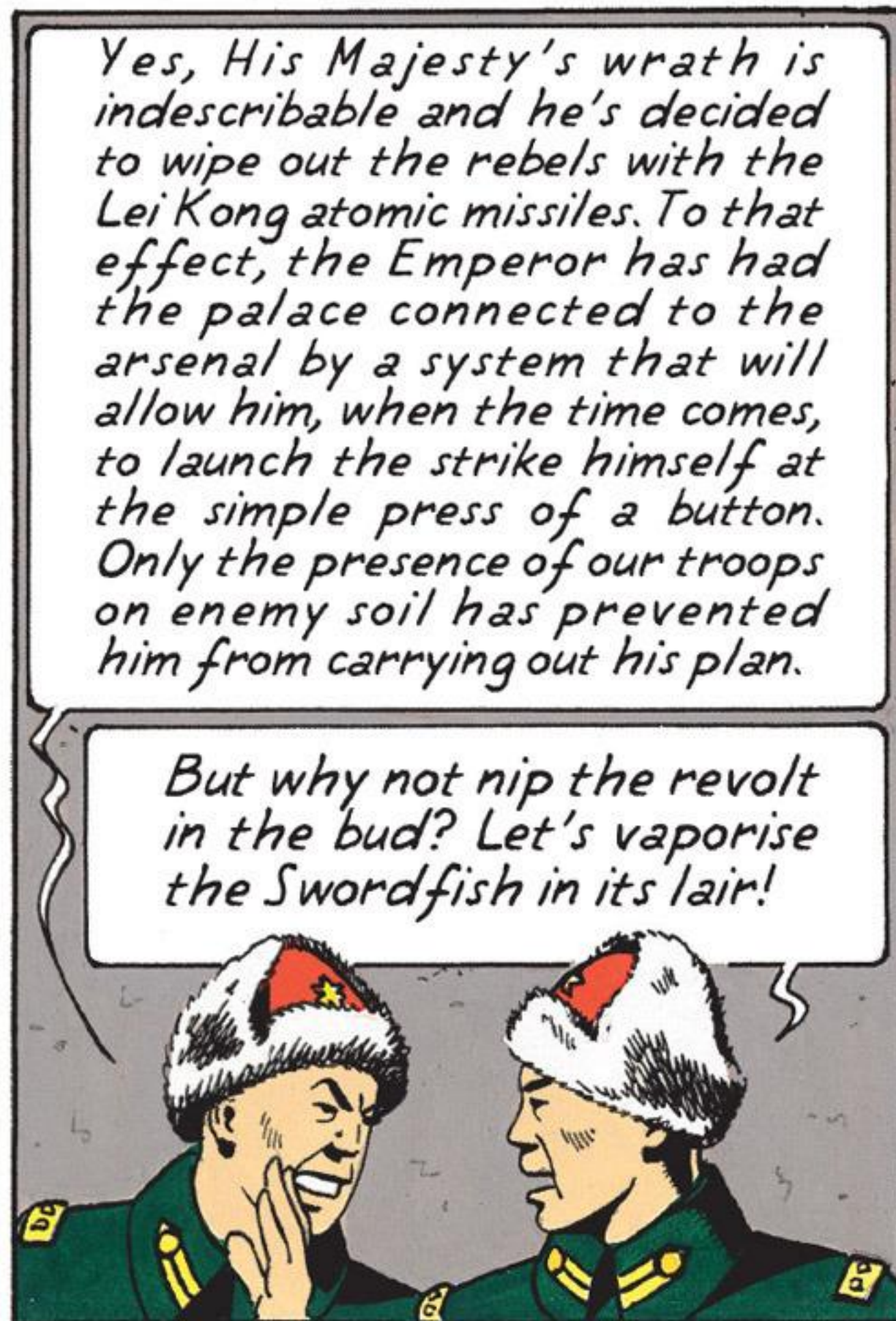




DESPITE THE CENSORSHIP'S DESPERATE EFFORTS, NEWS OF THE DISASTER OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ HAS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE AND FILLED THE EMPIRE WITH DISMAY.



AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE, THE GREAT COUNCIL HAS BEEN IN SESSION FOR THREE WHOLE DAYS.



Yes, His Majesty's wrath is indescribable and he's decided to wipe out the rebels with the Lei Kong atomic missiles. To that effect, the Emperor has had the palace connected to the arsenal by a system that will allow him, when the time comes, to launch the strike himself at the simple press of a button. Only the presence of our troops on enemy soil has prevented him from carrying out his plan.

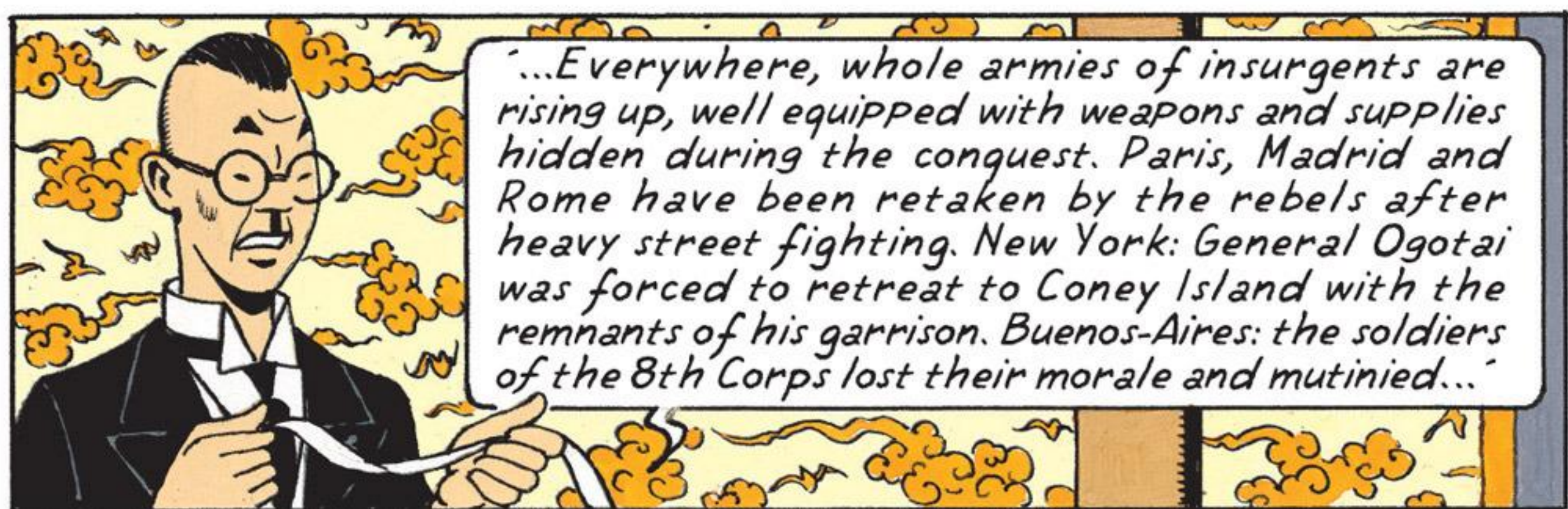
But why not nip the revolt in the bud? Let's vaporise the Swordfish in its lair!



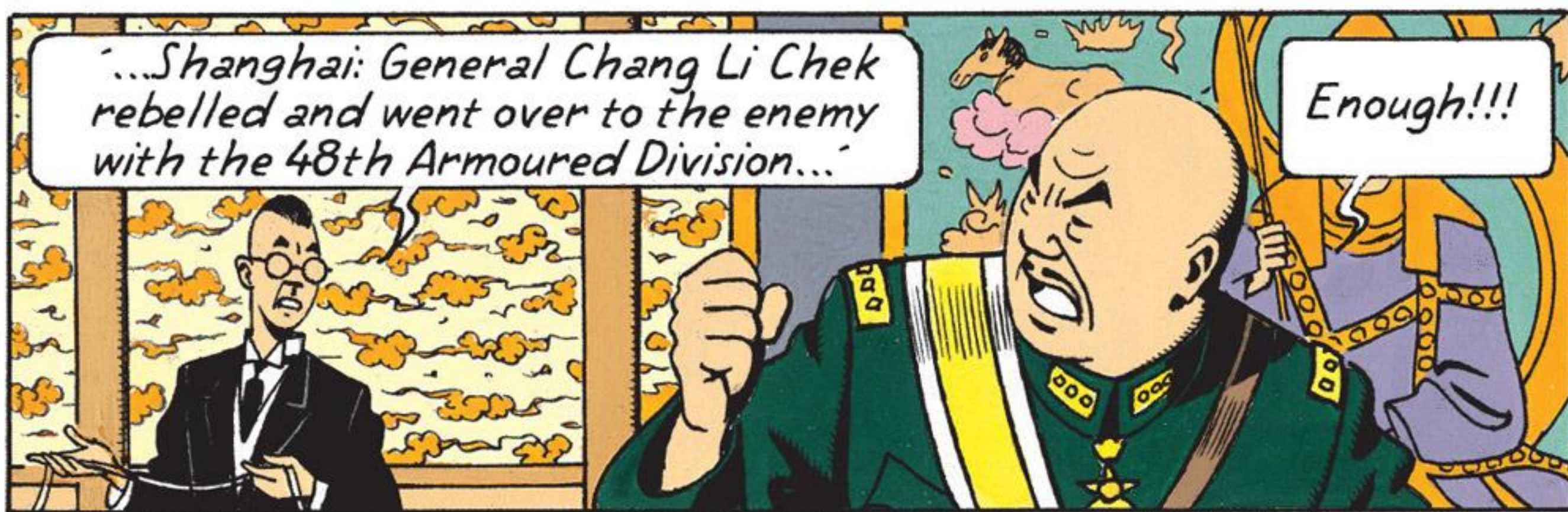
Yes, but the information gathered about the devil's machine is so confused and the panic that followed the debacle is so great that the general staff decided to wait for Olrik's report before risking another attack. So, in the meantime, the air force simply kept an eye on the Strait area, which is how Olrik's plane was located only a few hours ago, immobilised after a forced landing among the cliffs of Makran. He's expected back any minute now.



MEANWHILE, THE EMPEROR, LOCKED INSIDE HIS OFFICE WITH DR SUN FO, IS LISTENING TO THE LATTER READING THE LATEST NEWS...

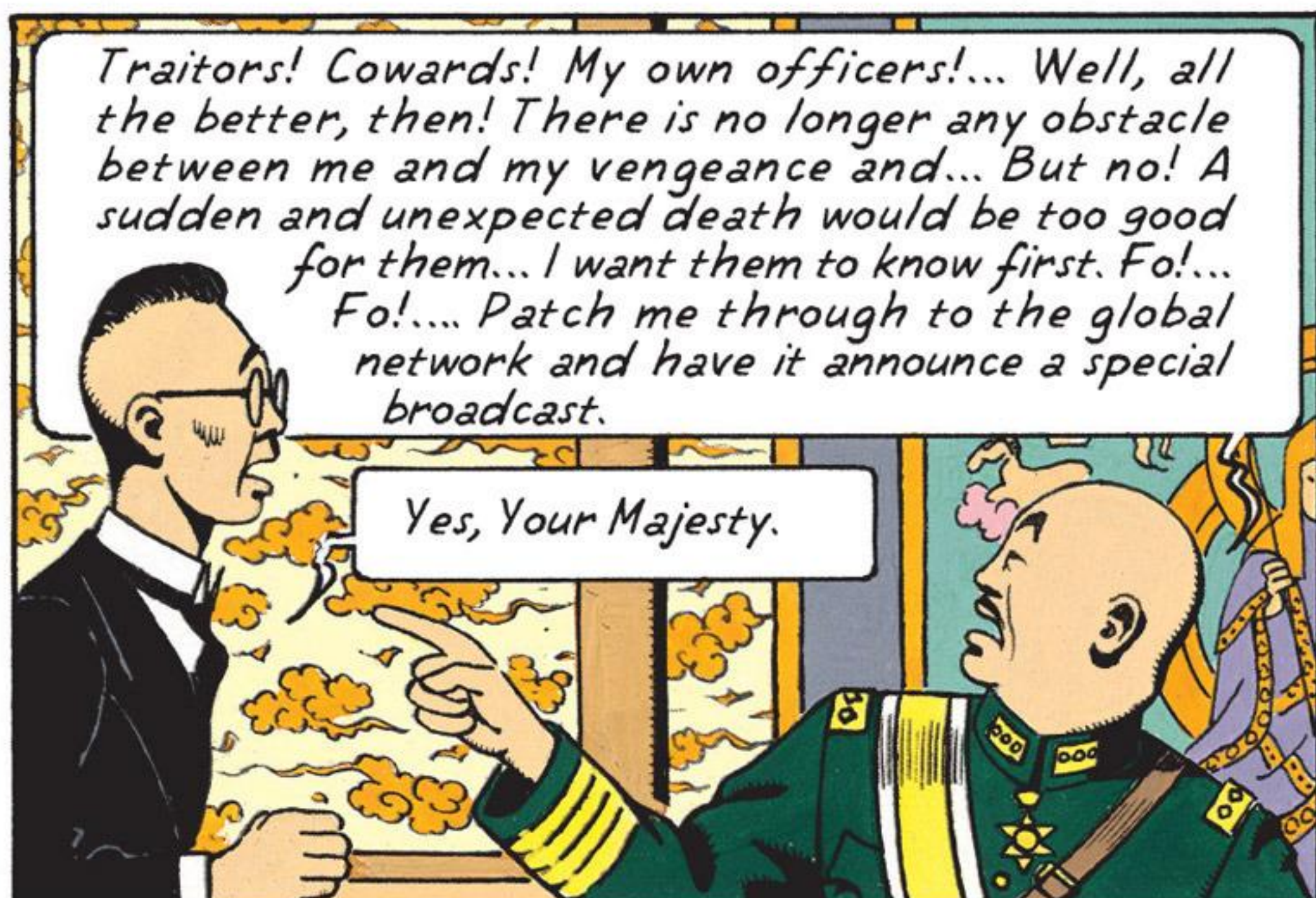


...Everywhere, whole armies of insurgents are rising up, well equipped with weapons and supplies hidden during the conquest. Paris, Madrid and Rome have been retaken by the rebels after heavy street fighting. New York: General Ogotai was forced to retreat to Coney Island with the remnants of his garrison. Buenos-Aires: the soldiers of the 8th Corps lost their morale and mutinied...



...Shanghai: General Chang Li Chek rebelled and went over to the enemy with the 48th Armoured Division...

Enough!!!

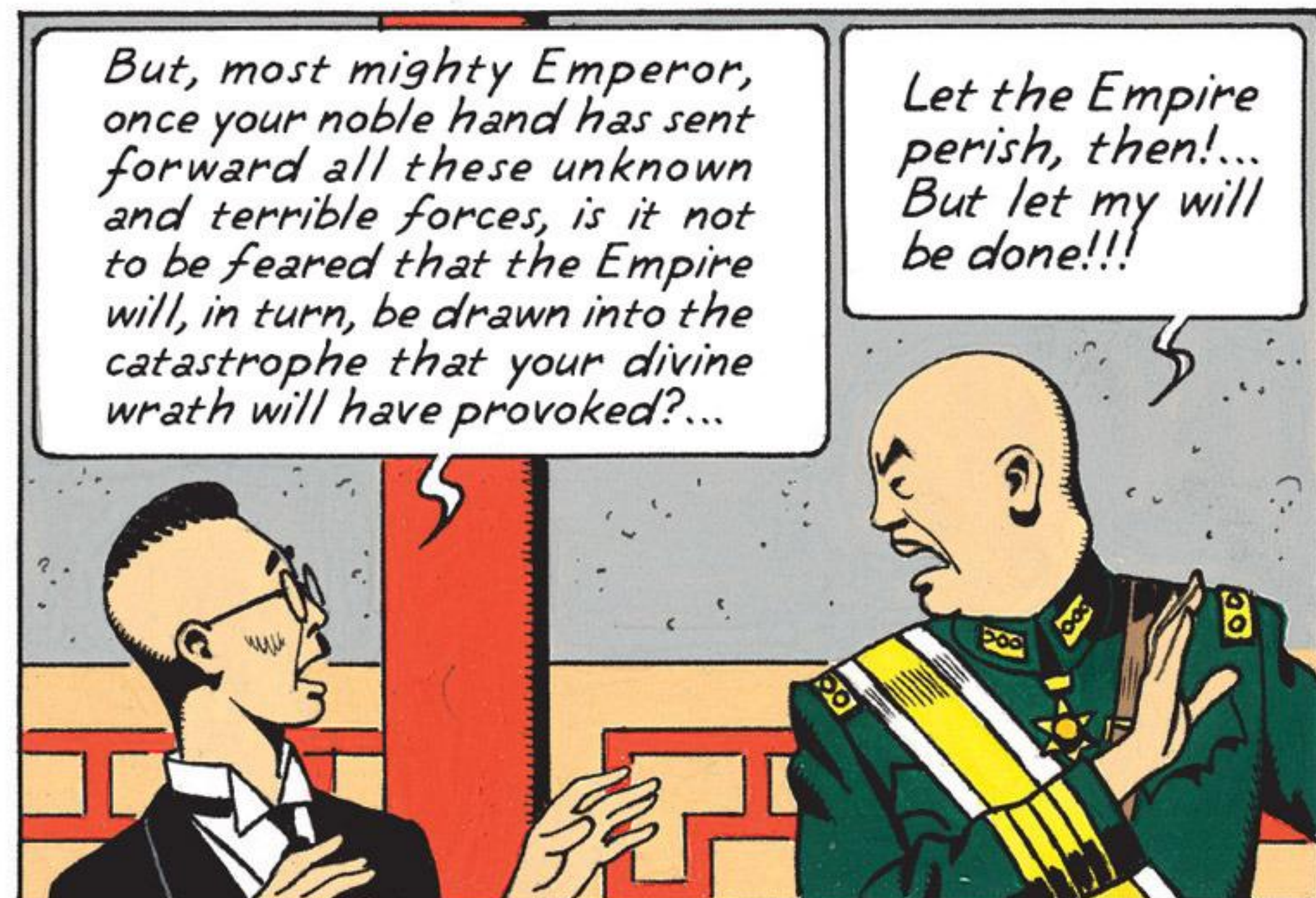


Traitors! Cowards! My own officers!... Well, all the better, then! There is no longer any obstacle between me and my vengeance and... But no! A sudden and unexpected death would be too good for them... I want them to know first. Fo!... Fo!... Patch me through to the global network and have it announce a special broadcast.

Yes, Your Majesty.



...when, hidden deep inside the Yen Wang Ye valley, a thousand carriers of death await only a wave of my hand to leap into the skies!!!

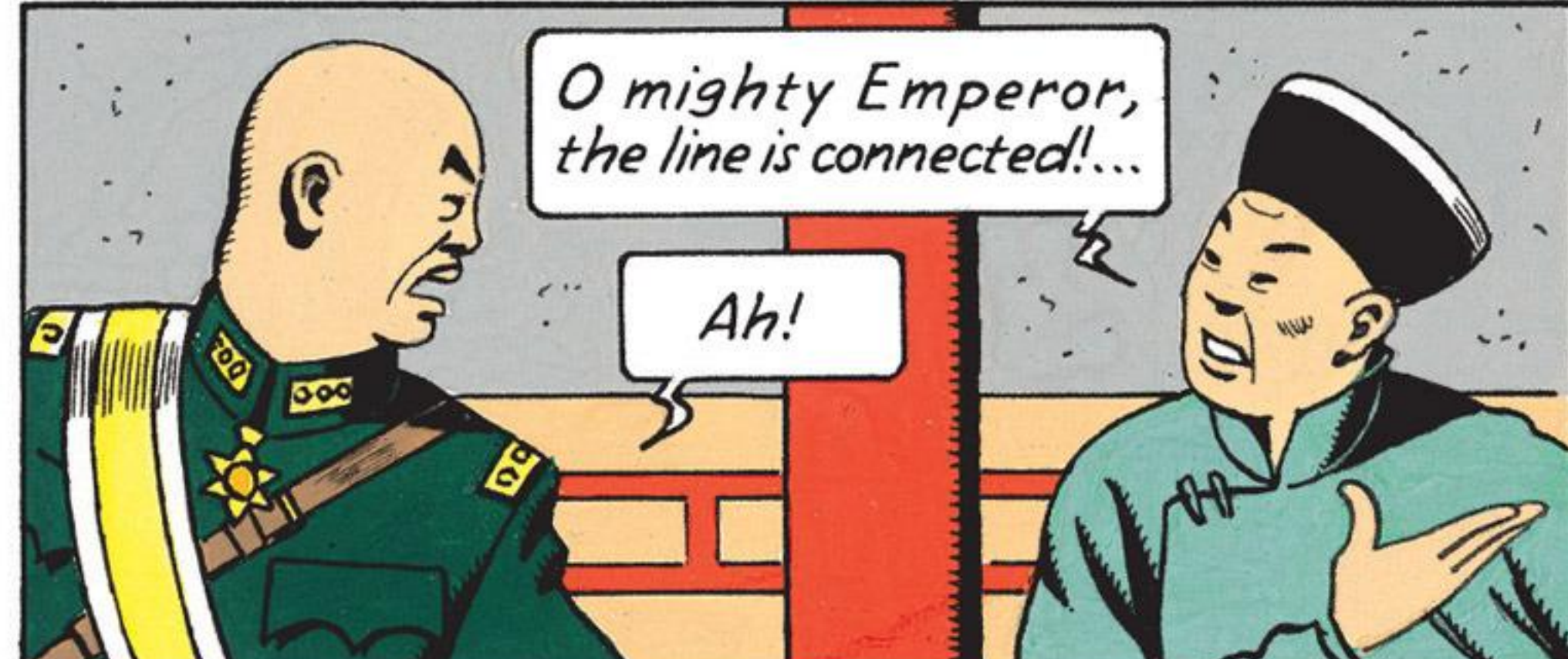


But, most mighty Emperor, once your noble hand has sent forward all these unknown and terrible forces, is it not to be feared that the Empire will, in turn, be drawn into the catastrophe that your divine wrath will have provoked?...

Let the Empire perish, then!... But let my will be done!!!

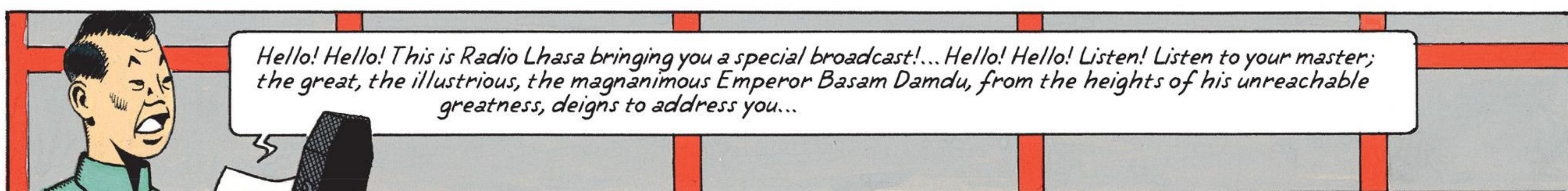


Ha! Ha! How can those pathetic worms be so arrogant as to rise against me...



O mighty Emperor, the line is connected!...

Ah!



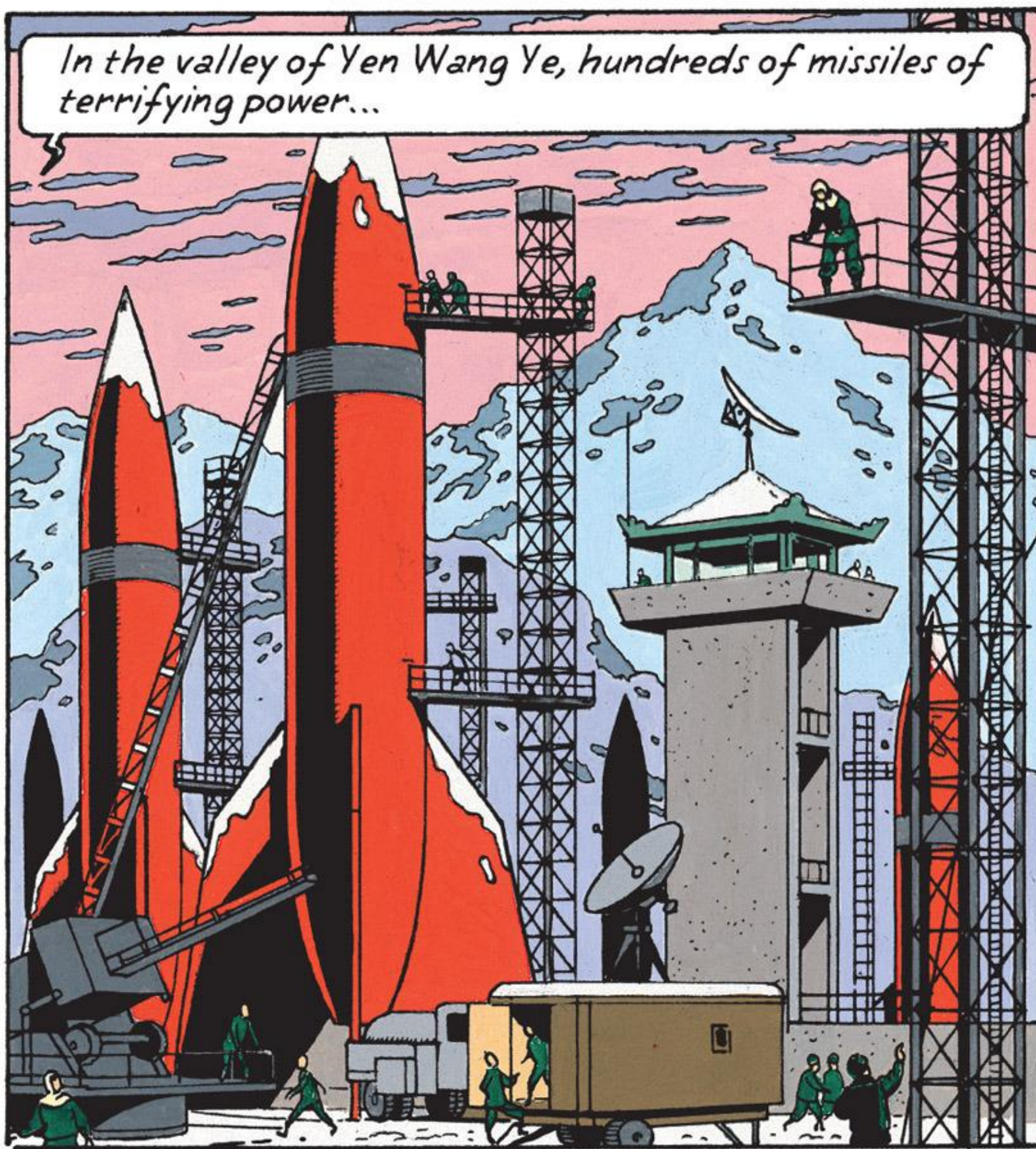
Hello! Hello! This is Radio Lhasa bringing you a special broadcast!... Hello! Hello! Listen! Listen to your master; the great, the illustrious, the magnanimous Emperor Basam Damdu, from the heights of his unreachable greatness, deigns to address you...

AND THE EMPEROR SPEAKS...

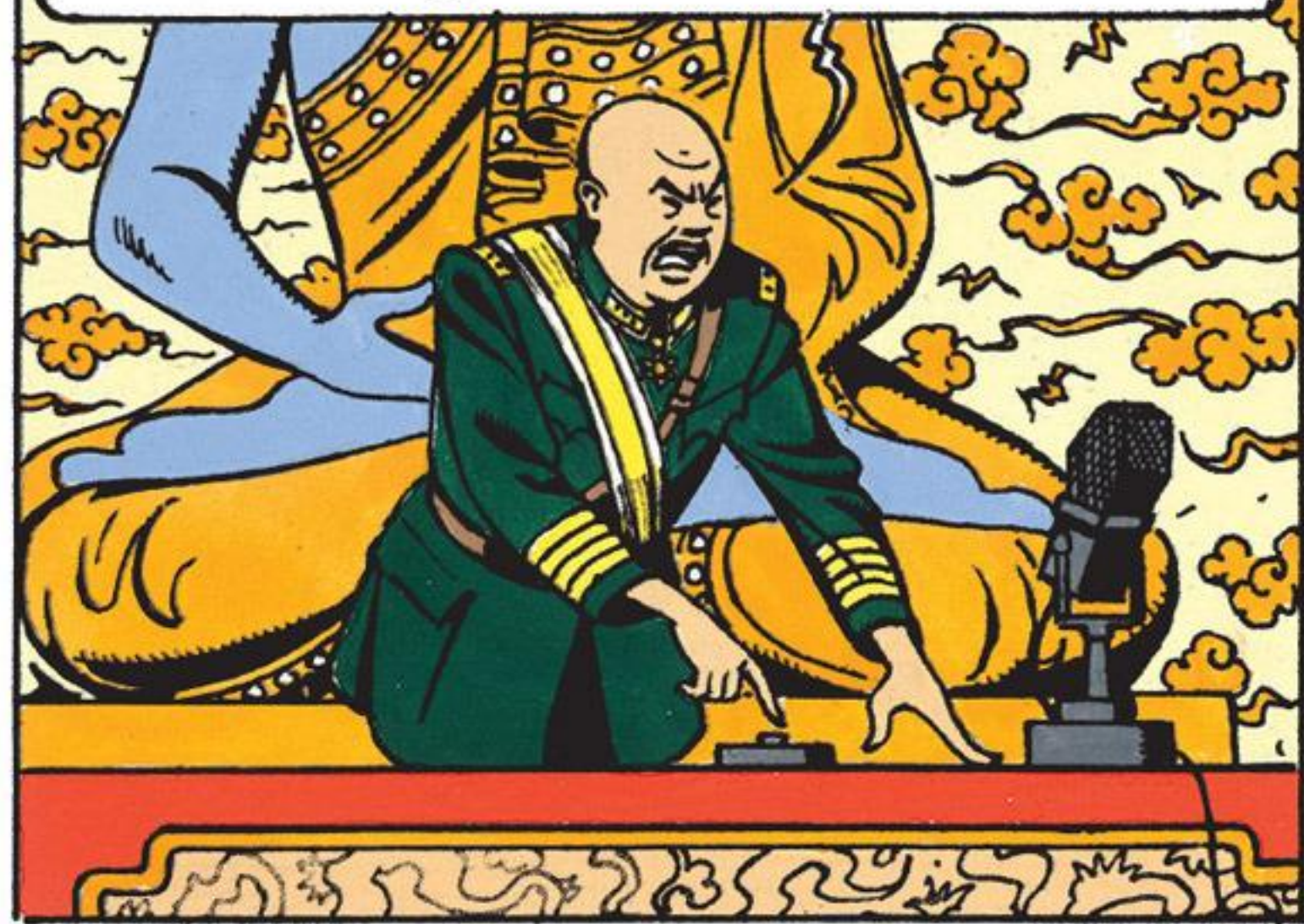
On your knees, wretched vermin! On your knees before my sublime greatness!... Prepare to appear before the implacable master of the ten tribunals, for I, Basam the Great, Emperor of the Eastern Peak, I sentence you to death! You who have dared, in your unthinkable hubris, to stand against the will of my unbounded might!



In the valley of Yen Wang Ye, hundreds of missiles of terrifying power...



...await, pointed at every corner of the Earth. In mere moments, the fires of the Eighteen Hells will be upon you. And it is I, Basam Damdu, son of the great Kwan Ti, who will unleash them from the top of my throne. As for you, disloyal soldiers who betrayed me, the Black and White Wuchang need only my word to drag you down to the Ten Shi-Tien Yen-Wang! I have spoken, and may Lei Gong's bronze hammer crush you and turn you to dust!!!... There... I am now bringing my finger to the button and counting... One... Two...



Exalted Majesty, Colonel Olrik requests the honour of an urgent audience...

Ah!... I almost forgot about him!!! Show him in!



Sire, I miraculously survived the disaster and made my way back to Lhasa, with all speed, to place myself at Your Majesty's orders and assist you with my modest advice...

I expected no less of you!... And what is your advice, loyal servant?



Sire, smash the Swordfish's lair with our atomic weapons without delay! And as I have a personal score to settle with those people, I request the honour of launching the first missile!

You shall have your wish!

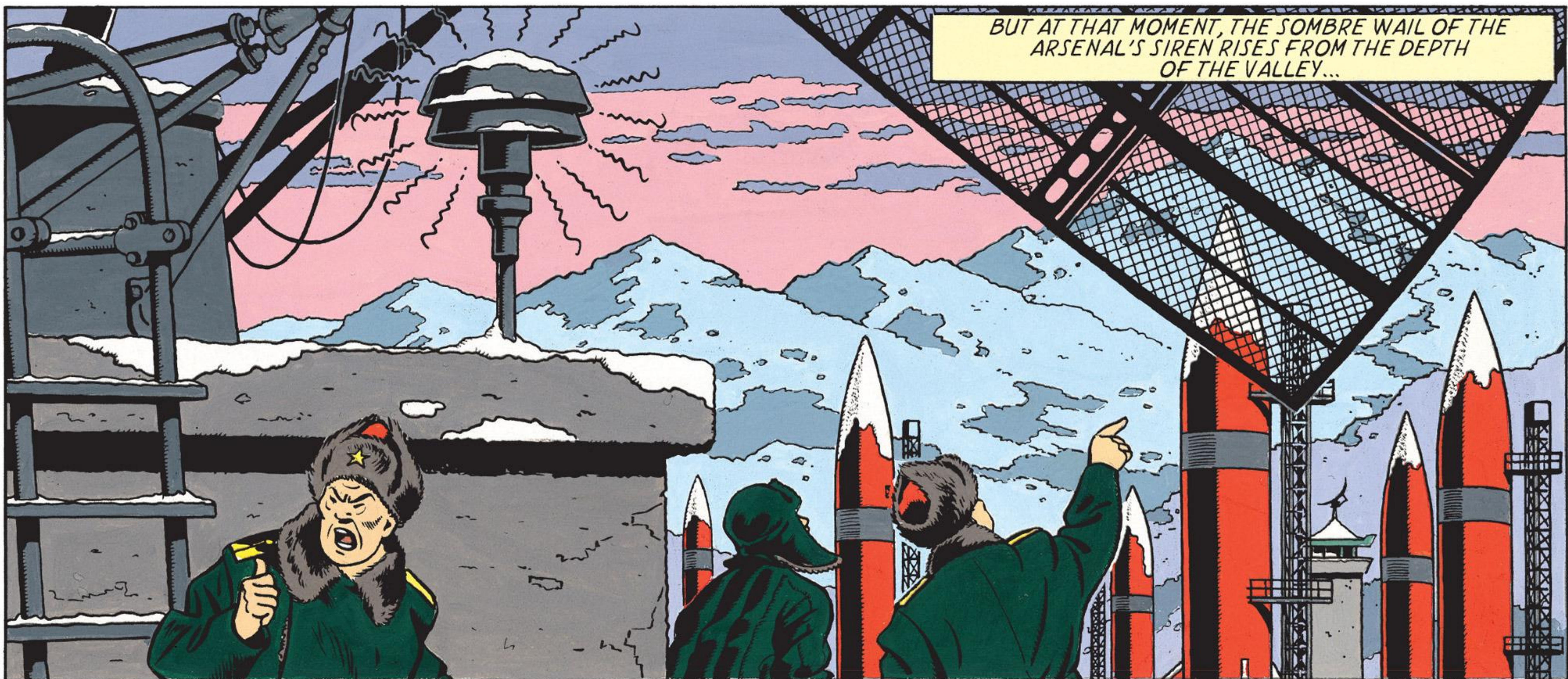


Guards! Seize that traitor and tie him to the first missile to be launched!!!

Sire!?!

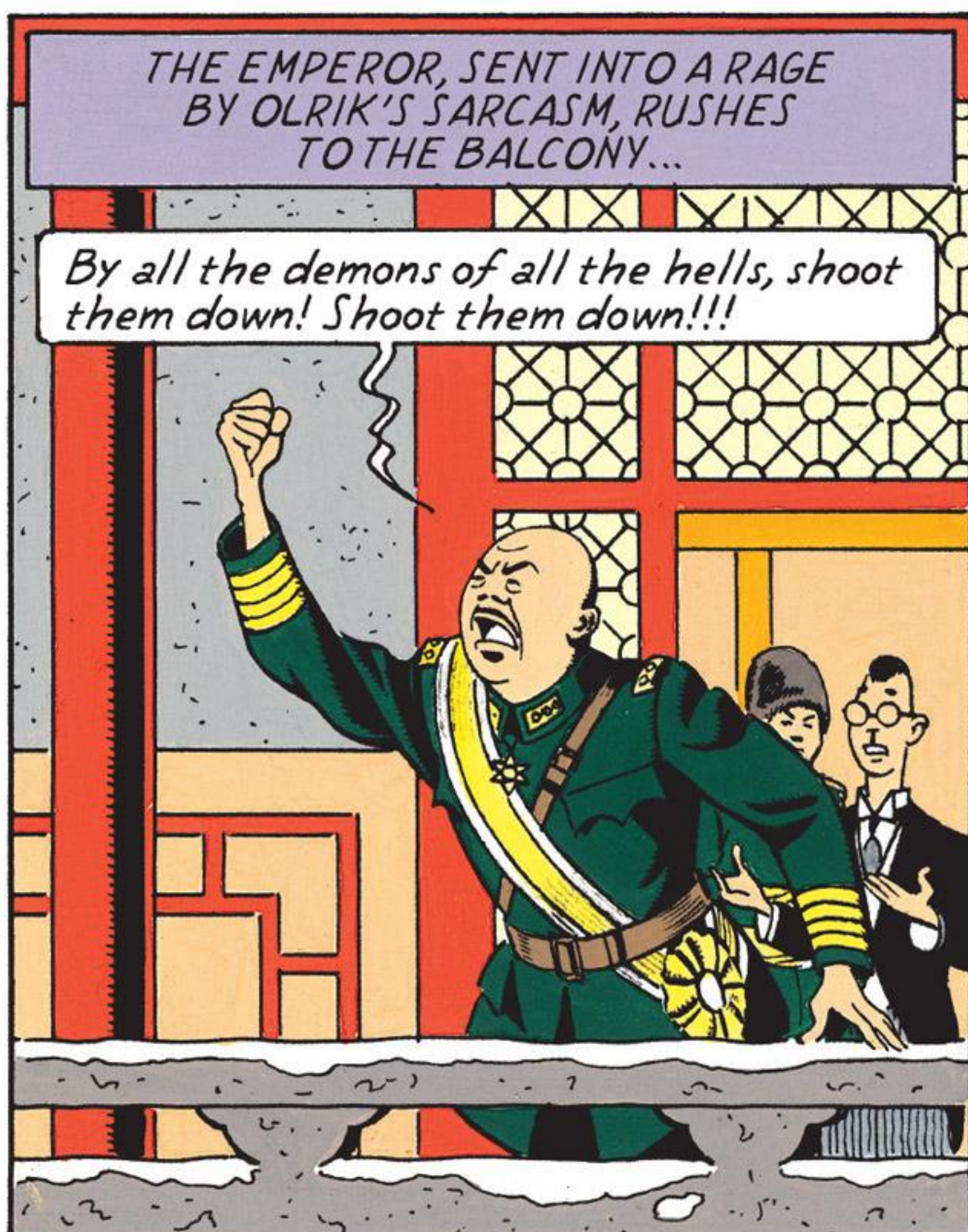
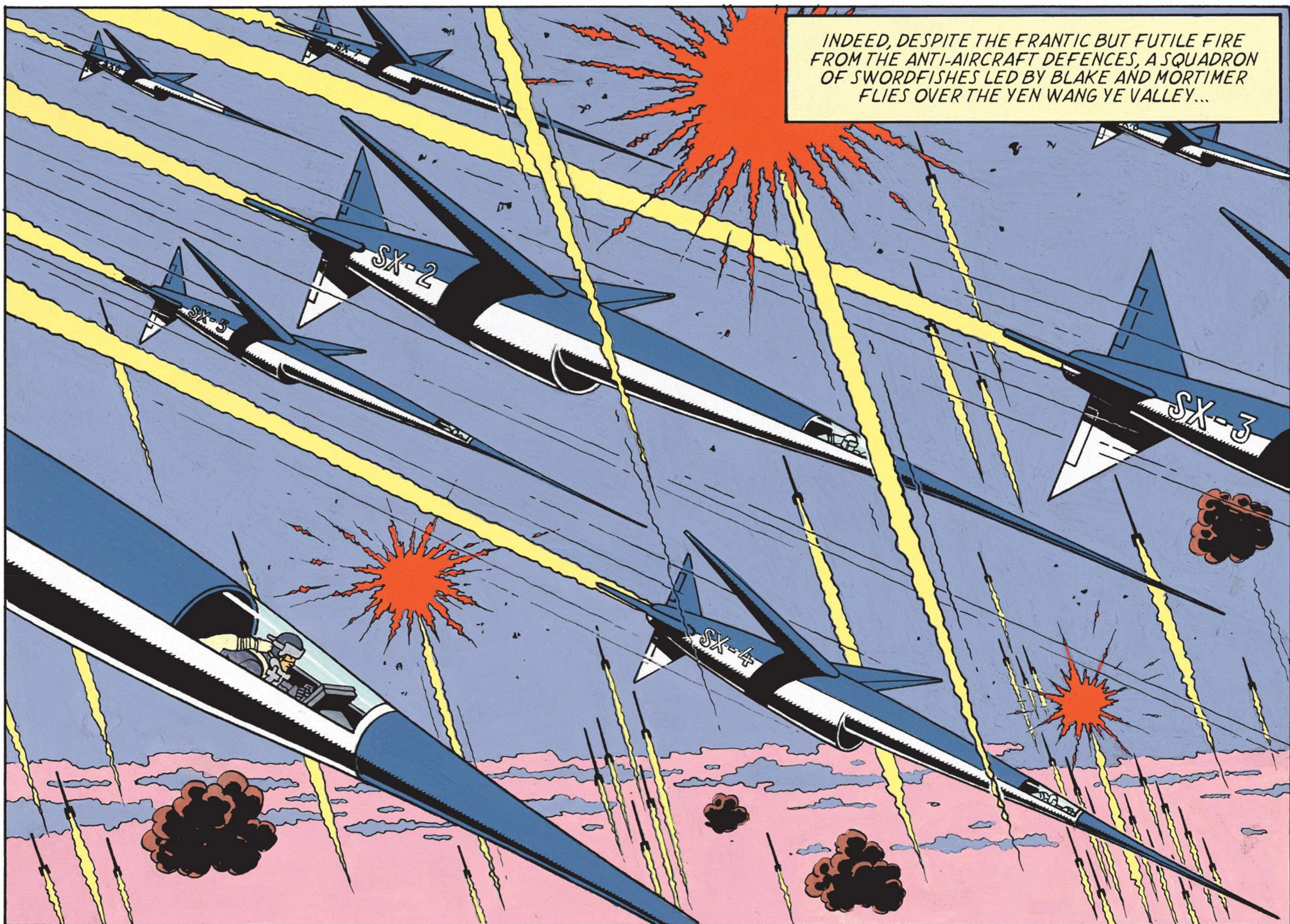


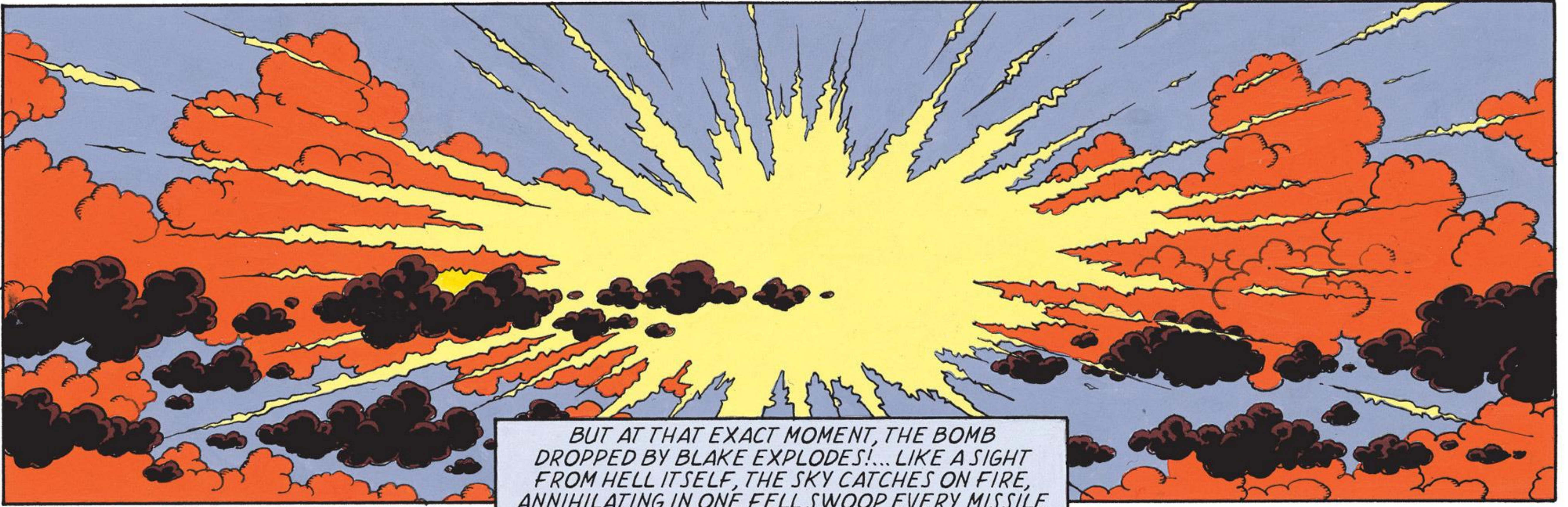
BUT AT THAT MOMENT, THE SOMBRE WAIL OF THE ARSENAL'S SIREN RISES FROM THE DEPTH OF THE VALLEY...



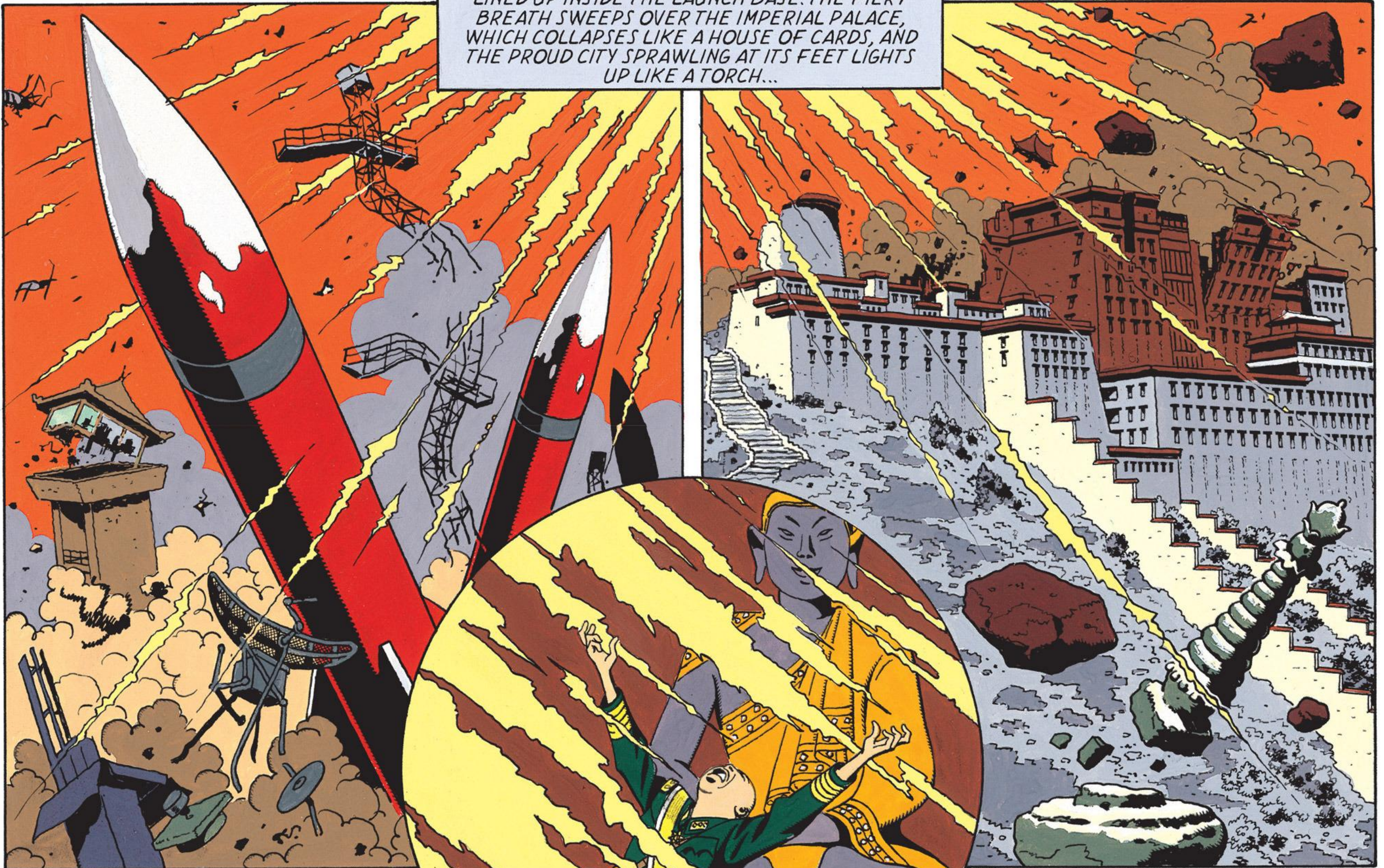


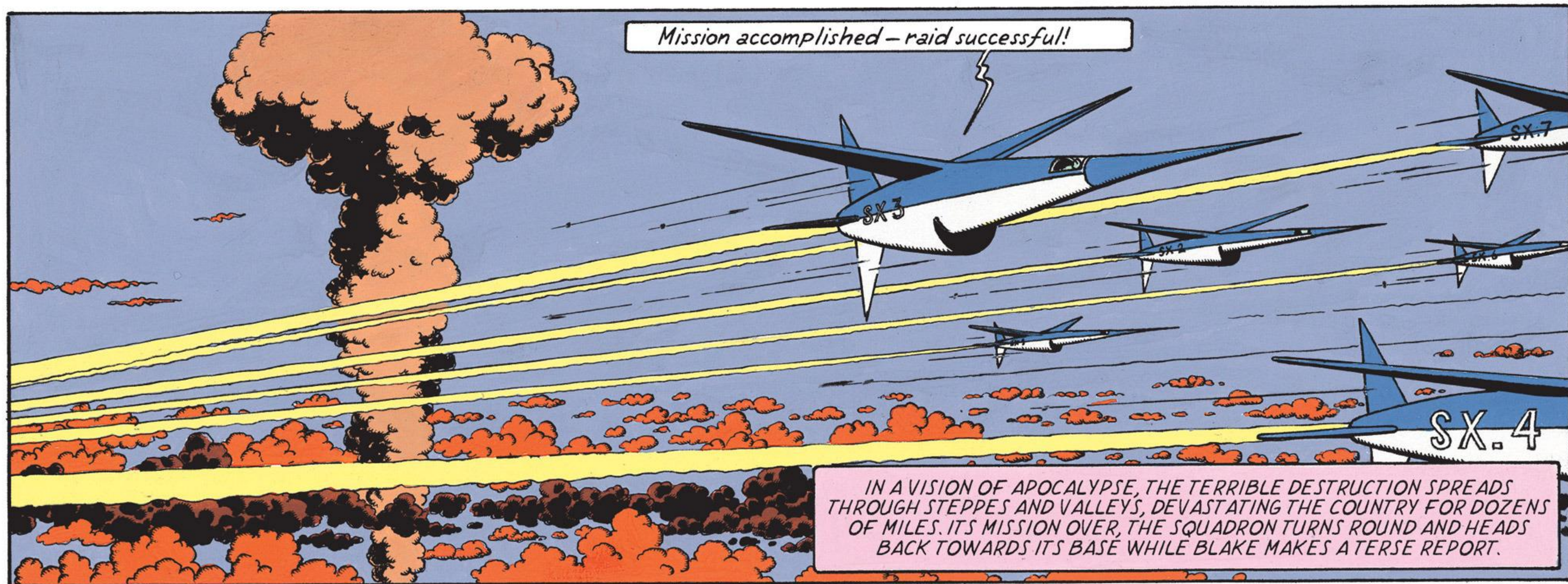
FROM ONE END OF THE LAUNCH BASE TO THE OTHER, THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERIES UNLEASH A FURIOUS FIRE!...





BUT AT THAT EXACT MOMENT, THE BOMB
DROPPED BY BLAKE EXPLODES!... LIKE A SIGHT
FROM HELL ITSELF, THE SKY CATCHES ON FIRE,
ANNIHILATING IN ONE FELL SWOOP EVERY MISSILE
LINED UP INSIDE THE LAUNCH BASE. THE FIERY
BREATH SWEEPS OVER THE IMPERIAL PALACE,
WHICH COLLAPSES LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS, AND
THE PROUD CITY SPRAWLING AT ITS FEET LIGHTS
UP LIKE A TORCH...





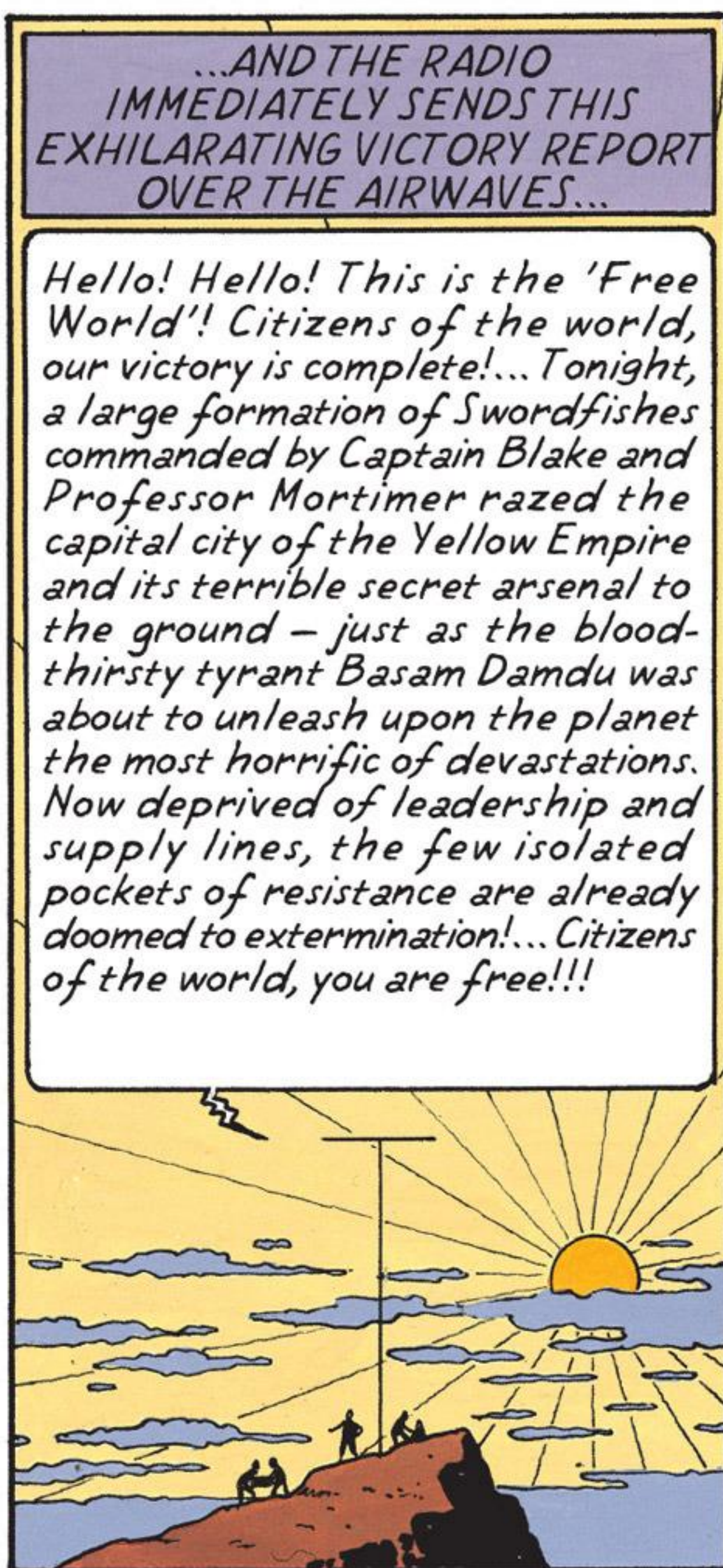
IN A VISION OF APOCALYPSE, THE TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION SPREADS THROUGH STEPPES AND VALLEYS, DEVASTATING THE COUNTRY FOR DOZENS OF MILES. ITS MISSION OVER, THE SQUADRON TURNS ROUND AND HEADS BACK TOWARDS ITS BASE WHILE BLAKE MAKES A TERSE REPORT.



WHEN THE NEWS REACHES THE BASE, IT AROUSES INDESCRIBABLE ENTHUSIASM...

Boys! The raid was successful! The city and the arsenal have been destroyed! Victory is ours!!!

Hip hip hurrah!

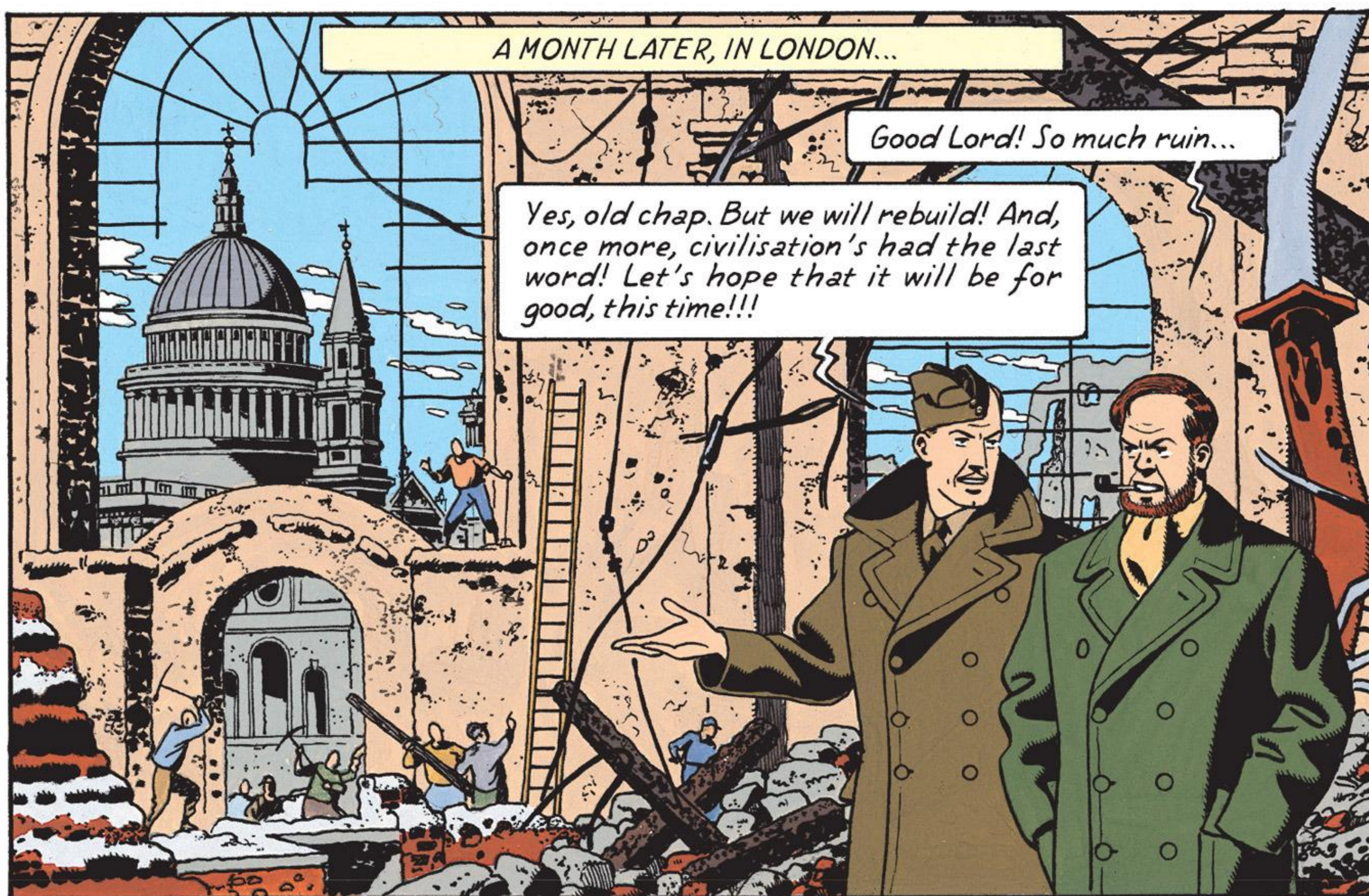


...AND THE RADIO IMMEDIATELY SENDS THIS EXHILARATING VICTORY REPORT OVER THE AIRWAVES...

Hello! Hello! This is the 'Free World'! Citizens of the world, our victory is complete!... Tonight, a large formation of Swordfishes commanded by Captain Blake and Professor Mortimer razed the capital city of the Yellow Empire and its terrible secret arsenal to the ground - just as the bloodthirsty tyrant Basam Damdu was about to unleash upon the planet the most horrific of devastations. Now deprived of leadership and supply lines, the few isolated pockets of resistance are already doomed to extermination!... Citizens of the world, you are free!!!



TWO HOURS LATER, THE VICTORIOUS SQUADRON RETURNS TO BASE, WELCOMED BY THE CHEERS OF THE GARRISON GATHERED ON THE GLORIOUS ROCK!



A MONTH LATER, IN LONDON...

Good Lord! So much ruin...

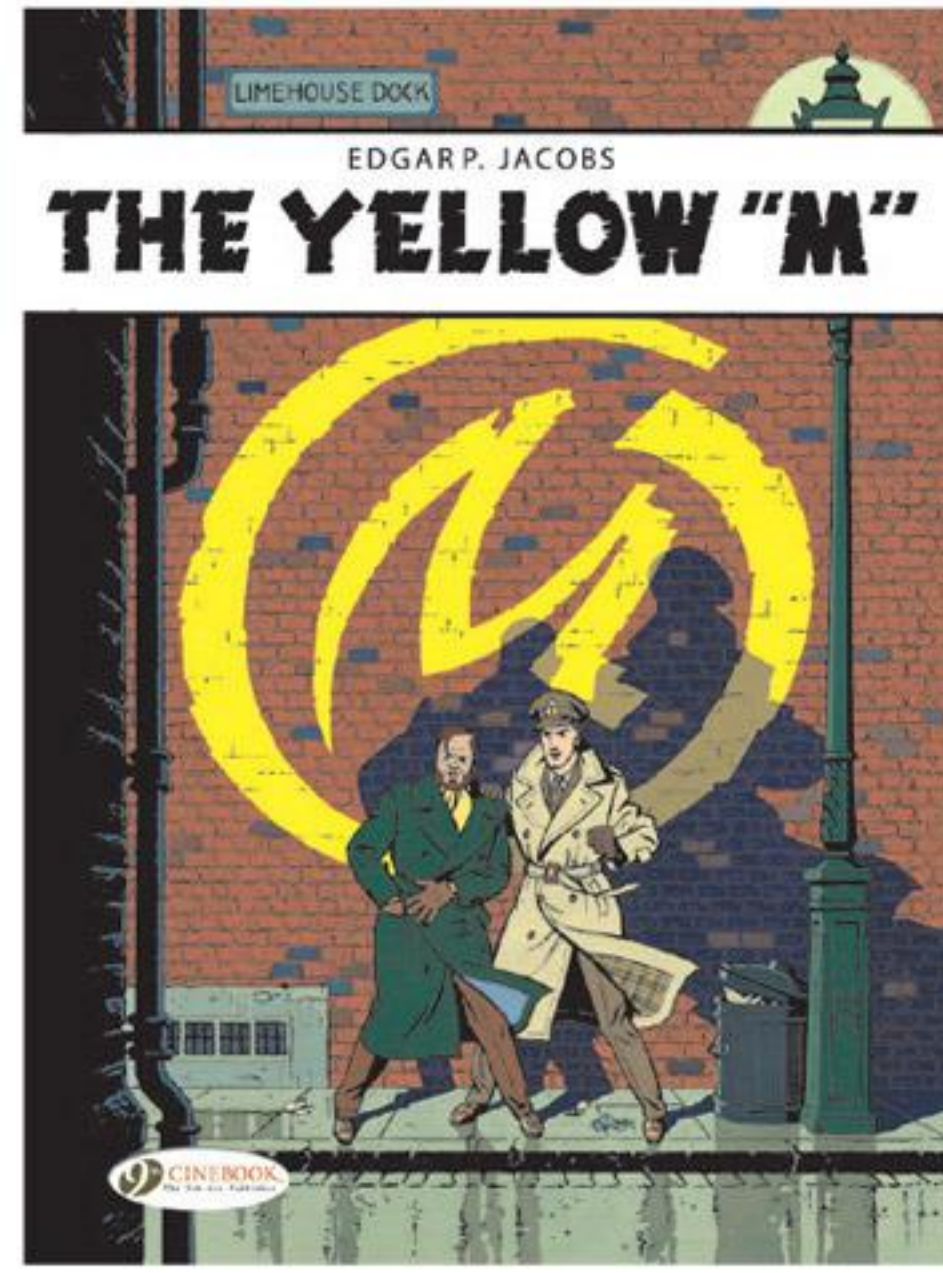
Yes, old chap. But we will rebuild! And, once more, civilisation's had the last word! Let's hope that it will be for good, this time!!!

THE

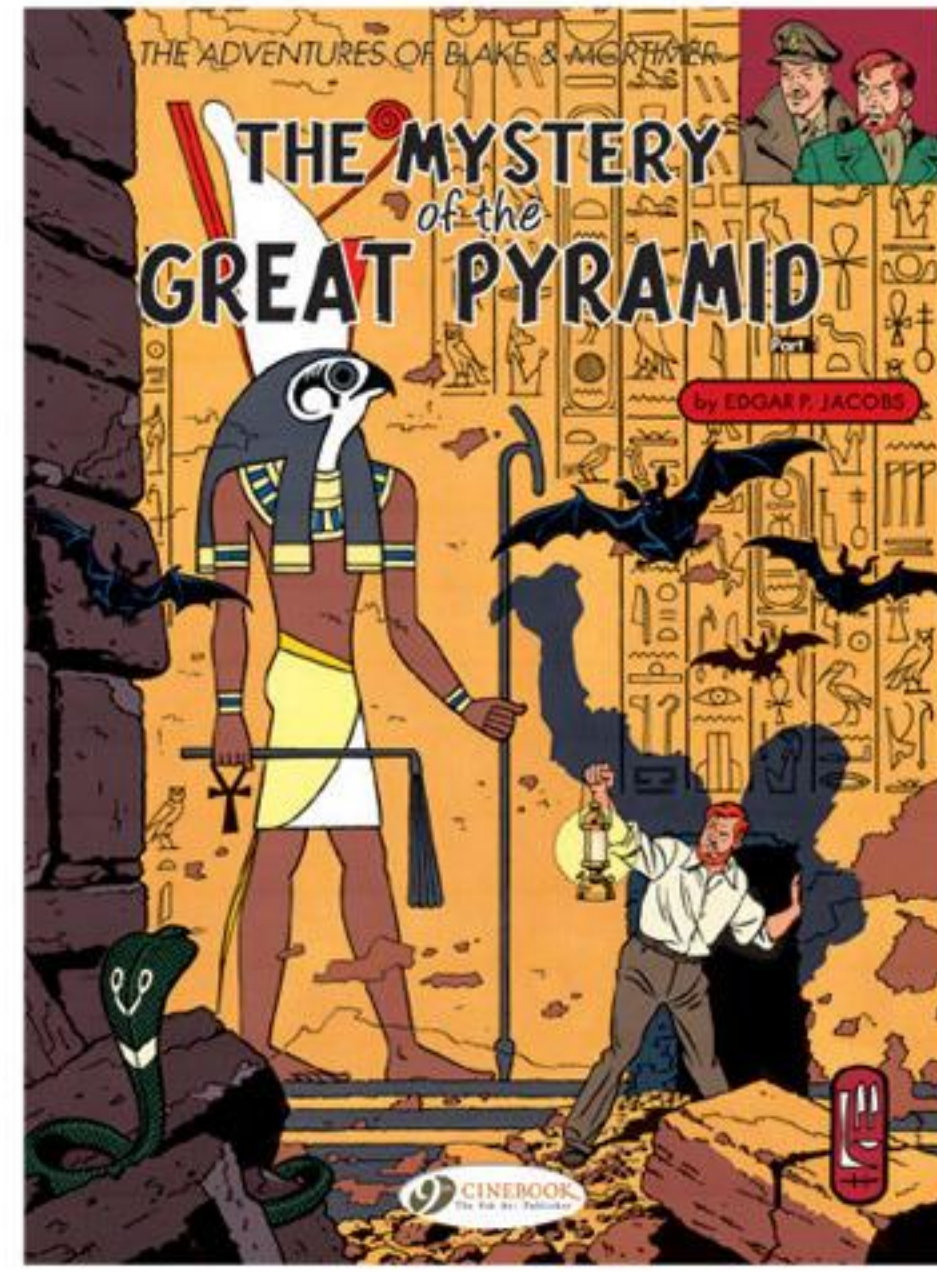
END



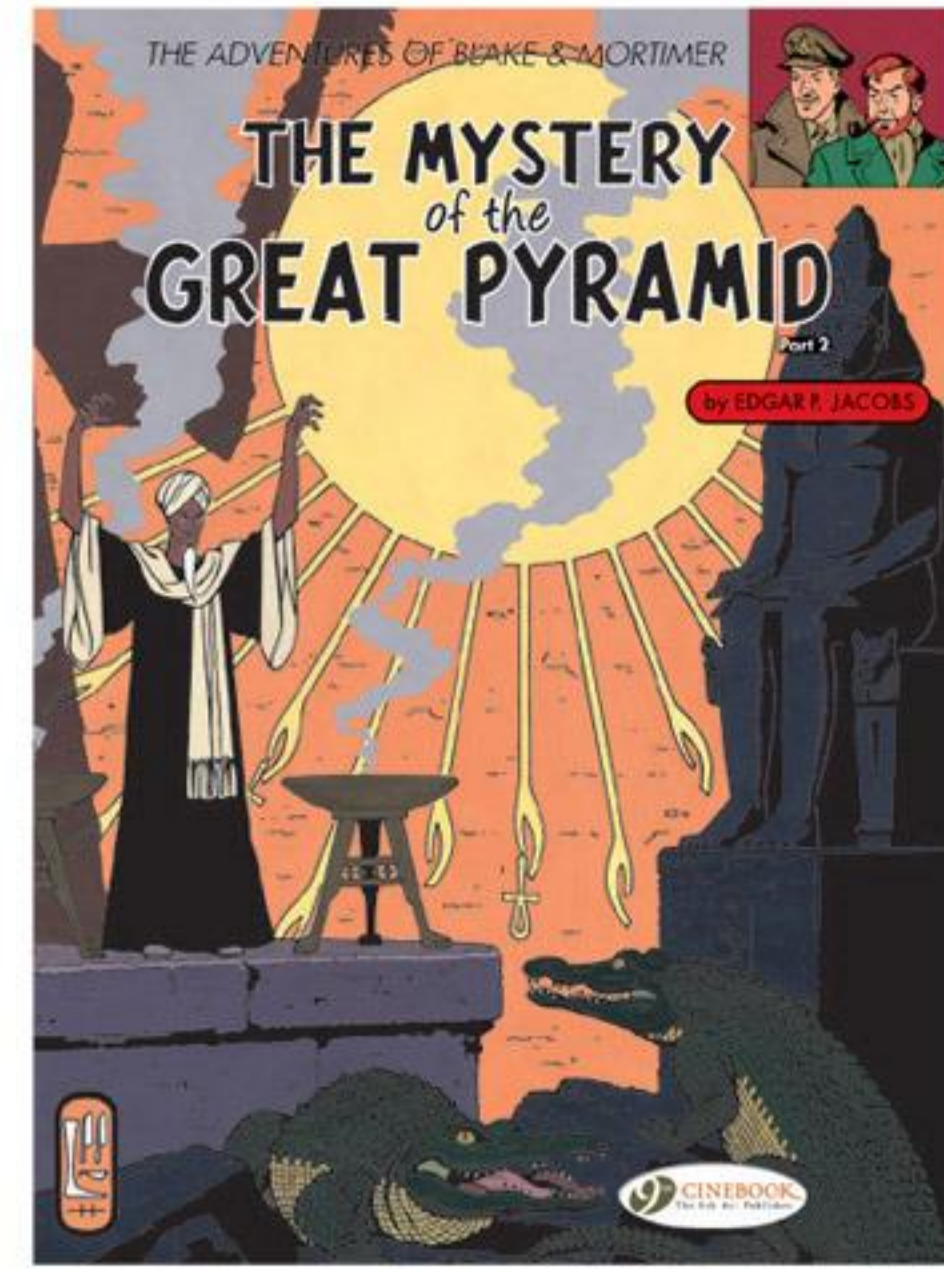
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



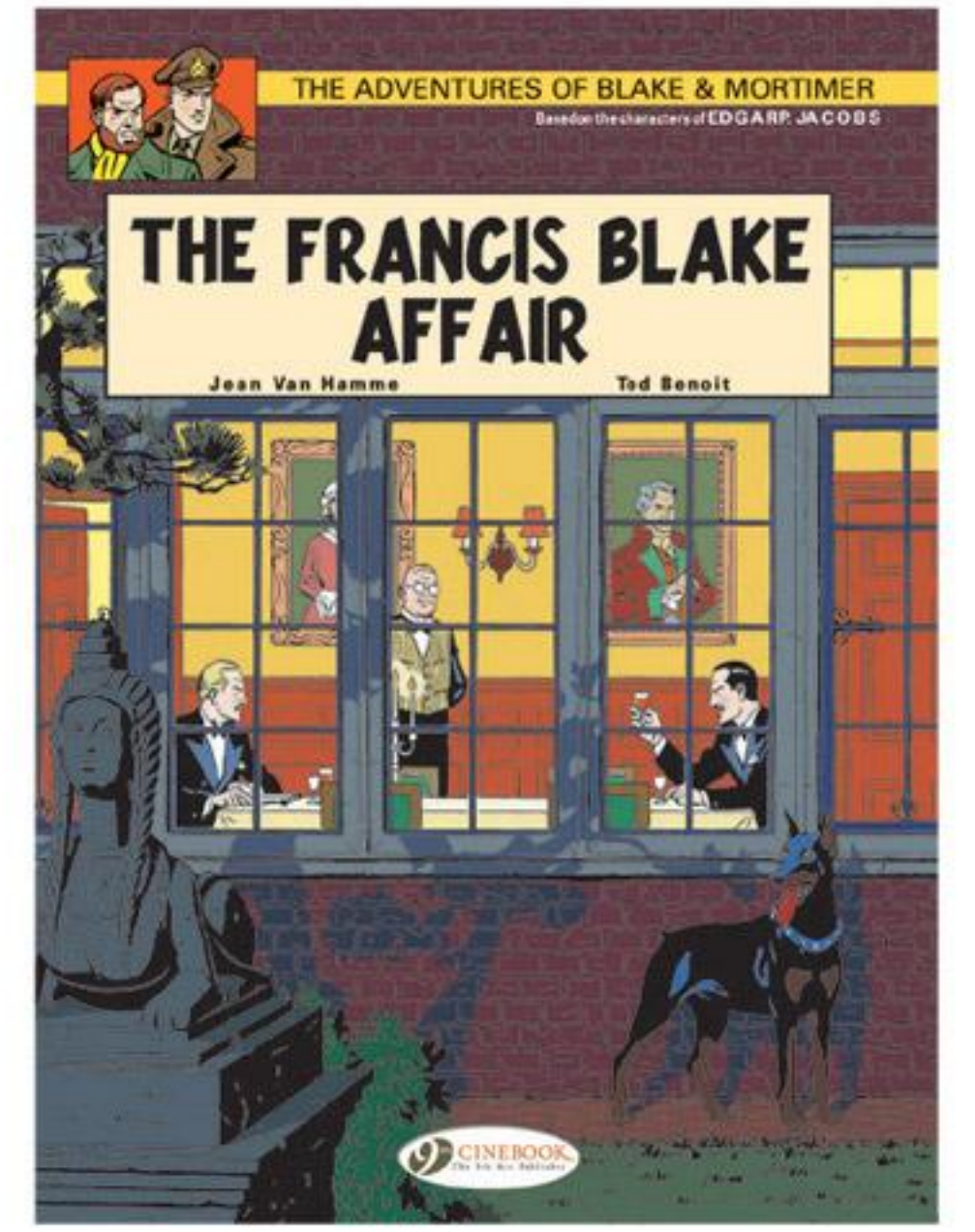
1-The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



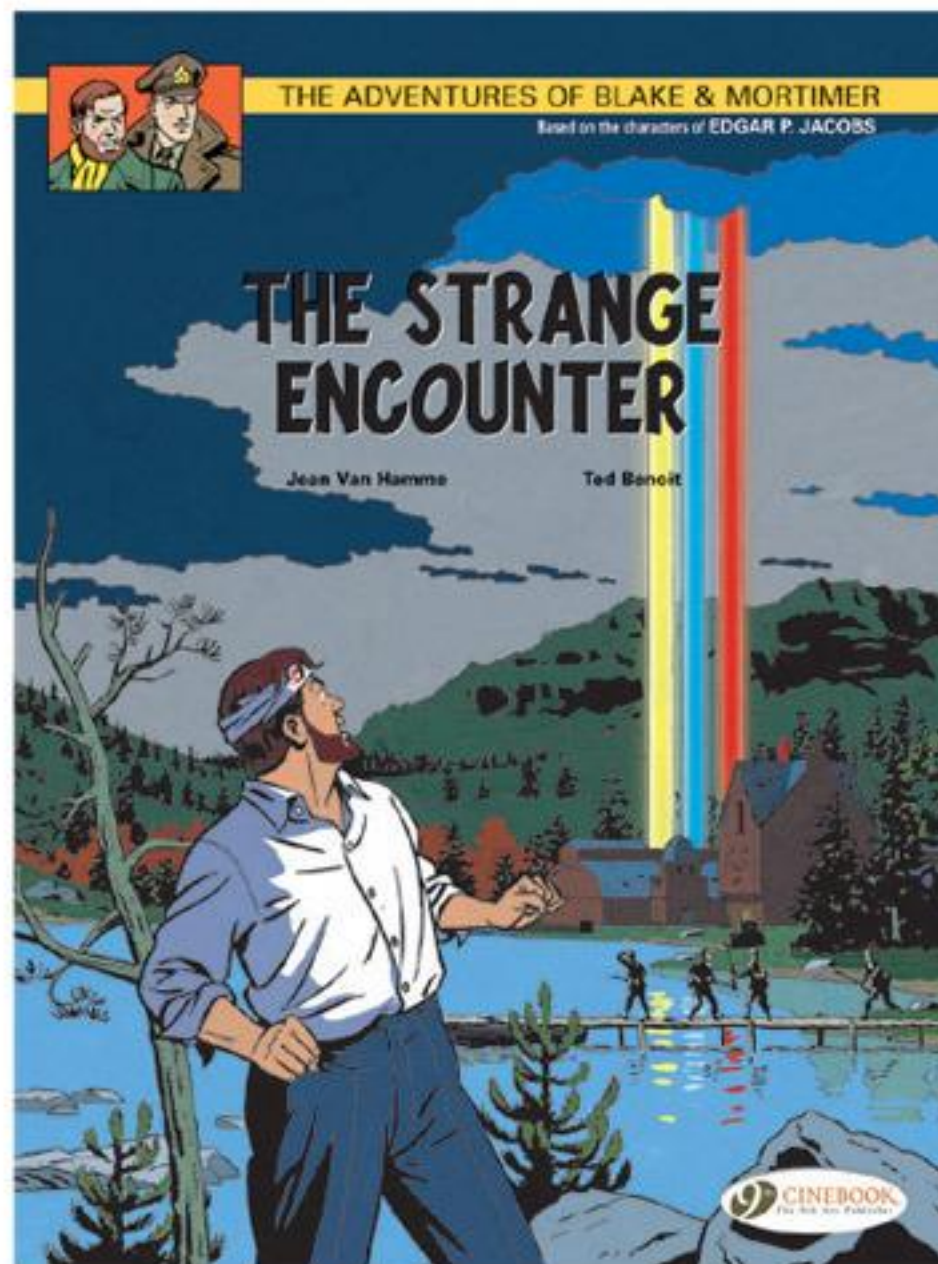
2-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



3-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



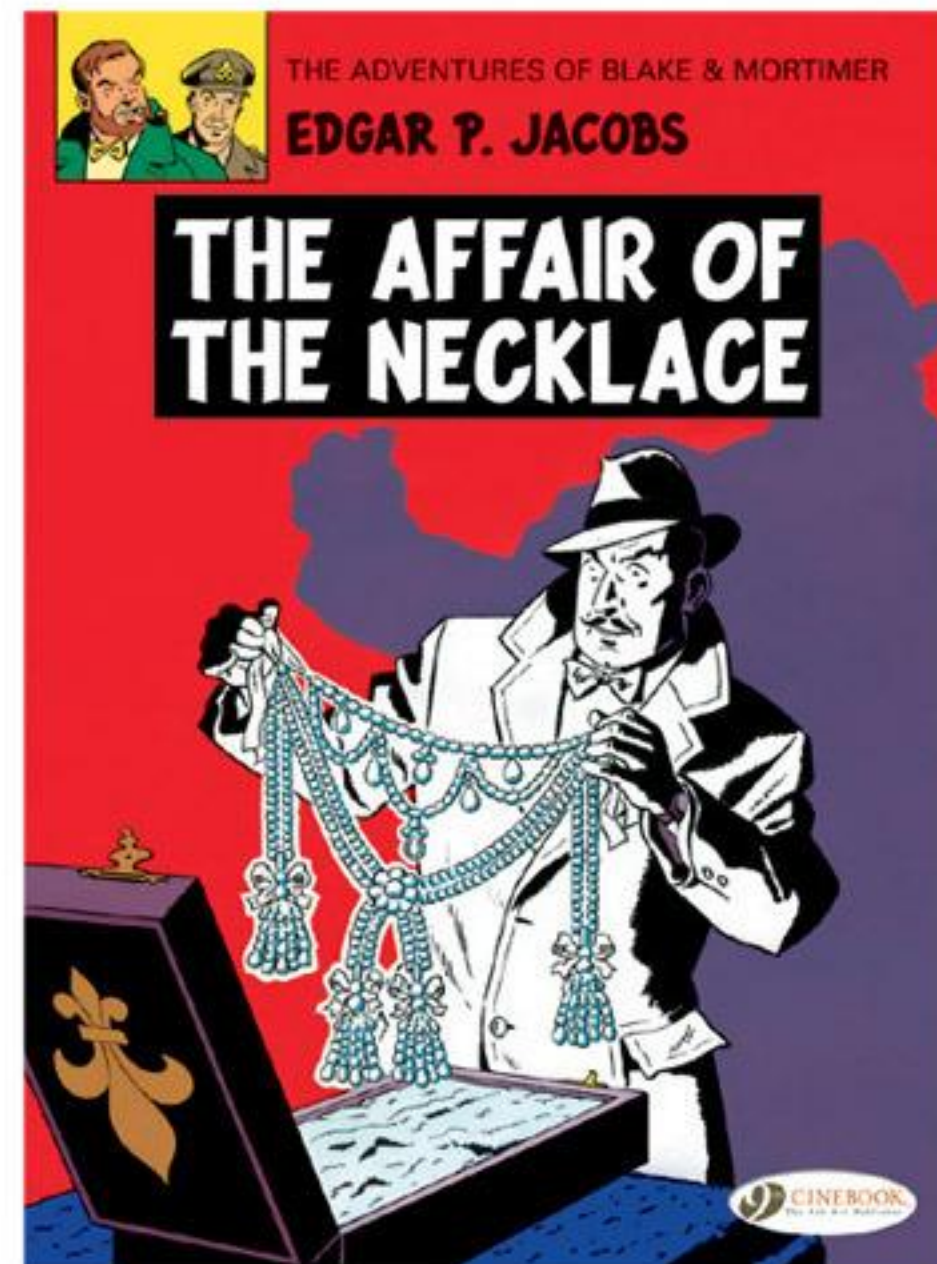
4-The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



5-The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



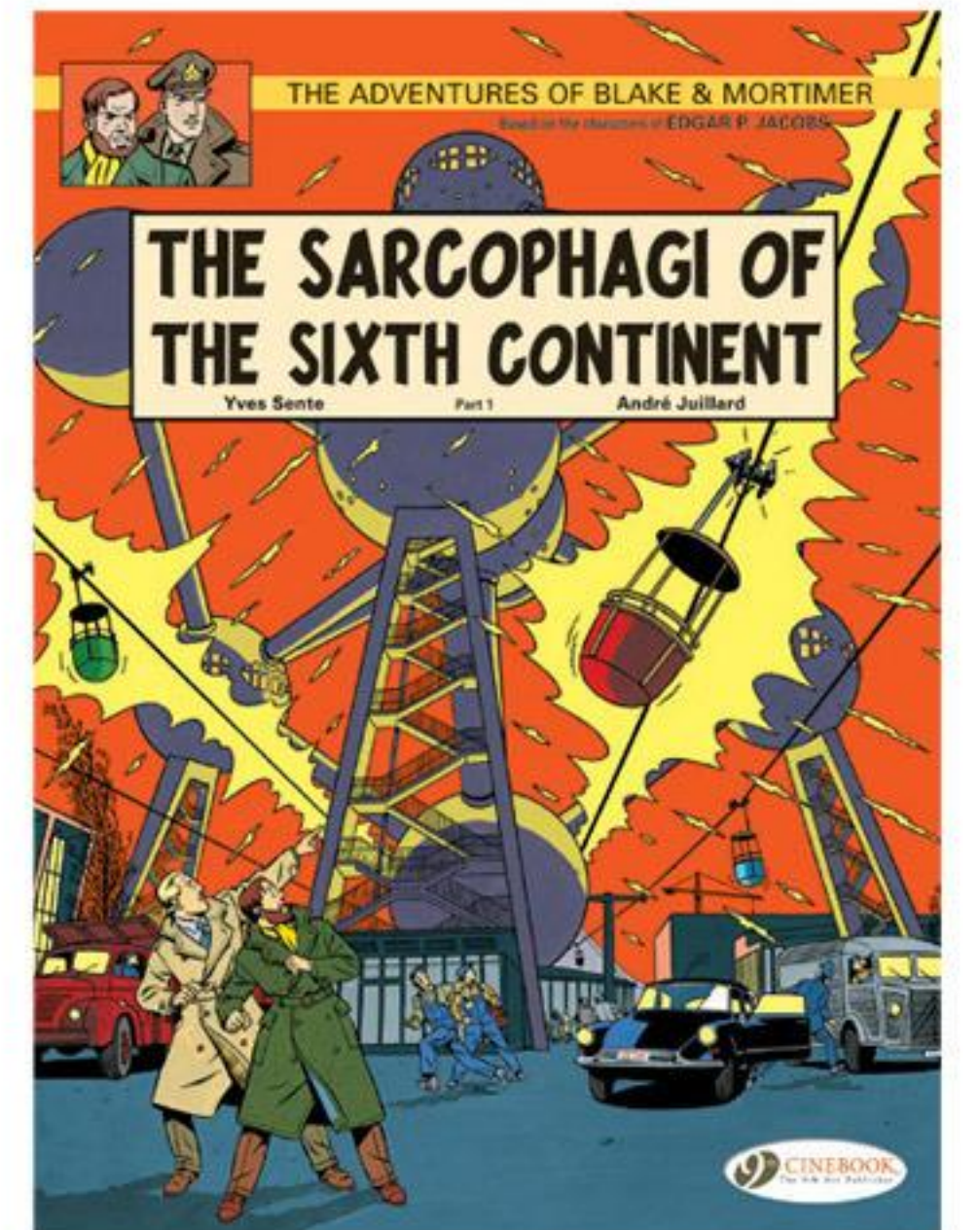
6-S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



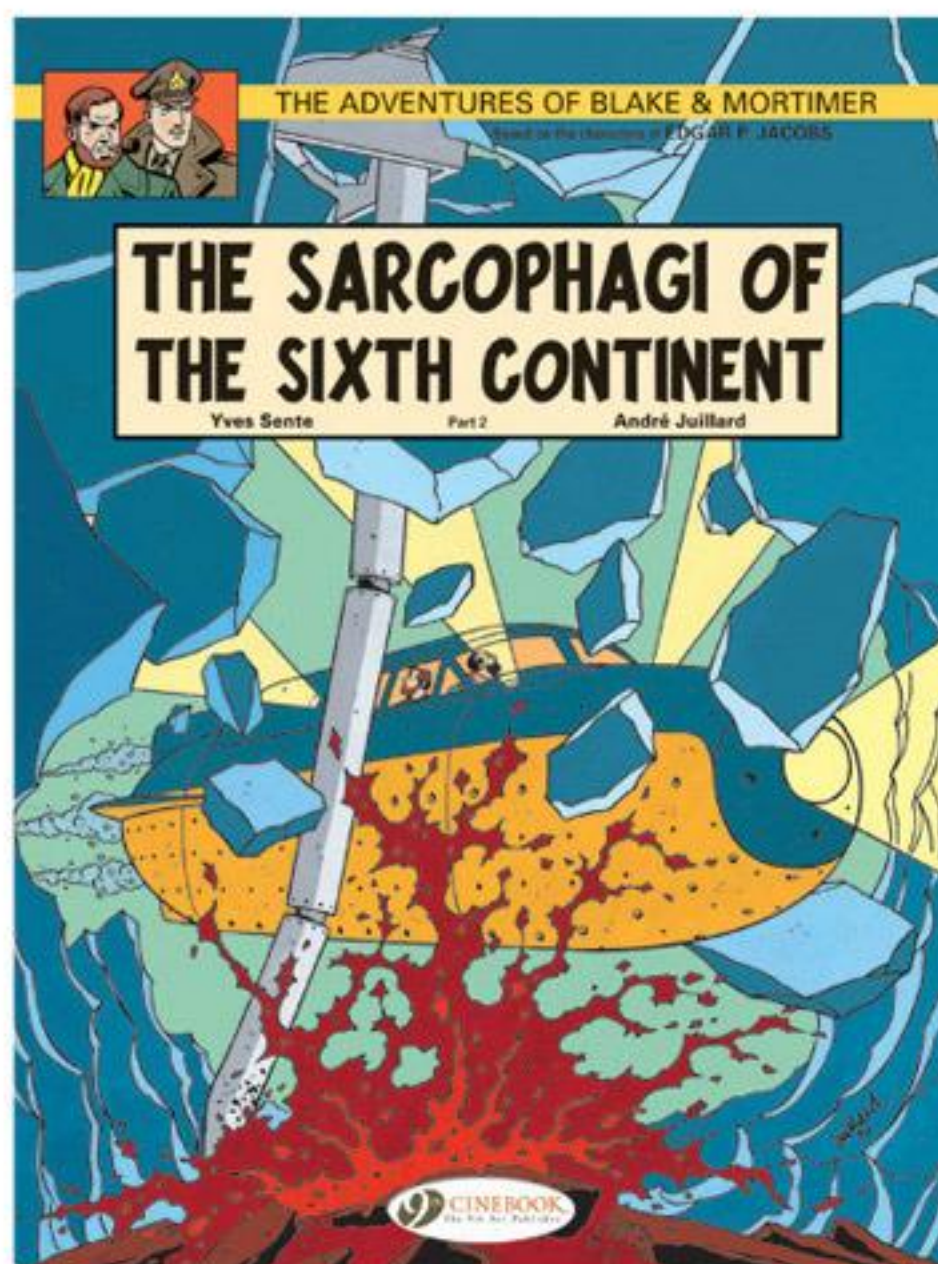
7-The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



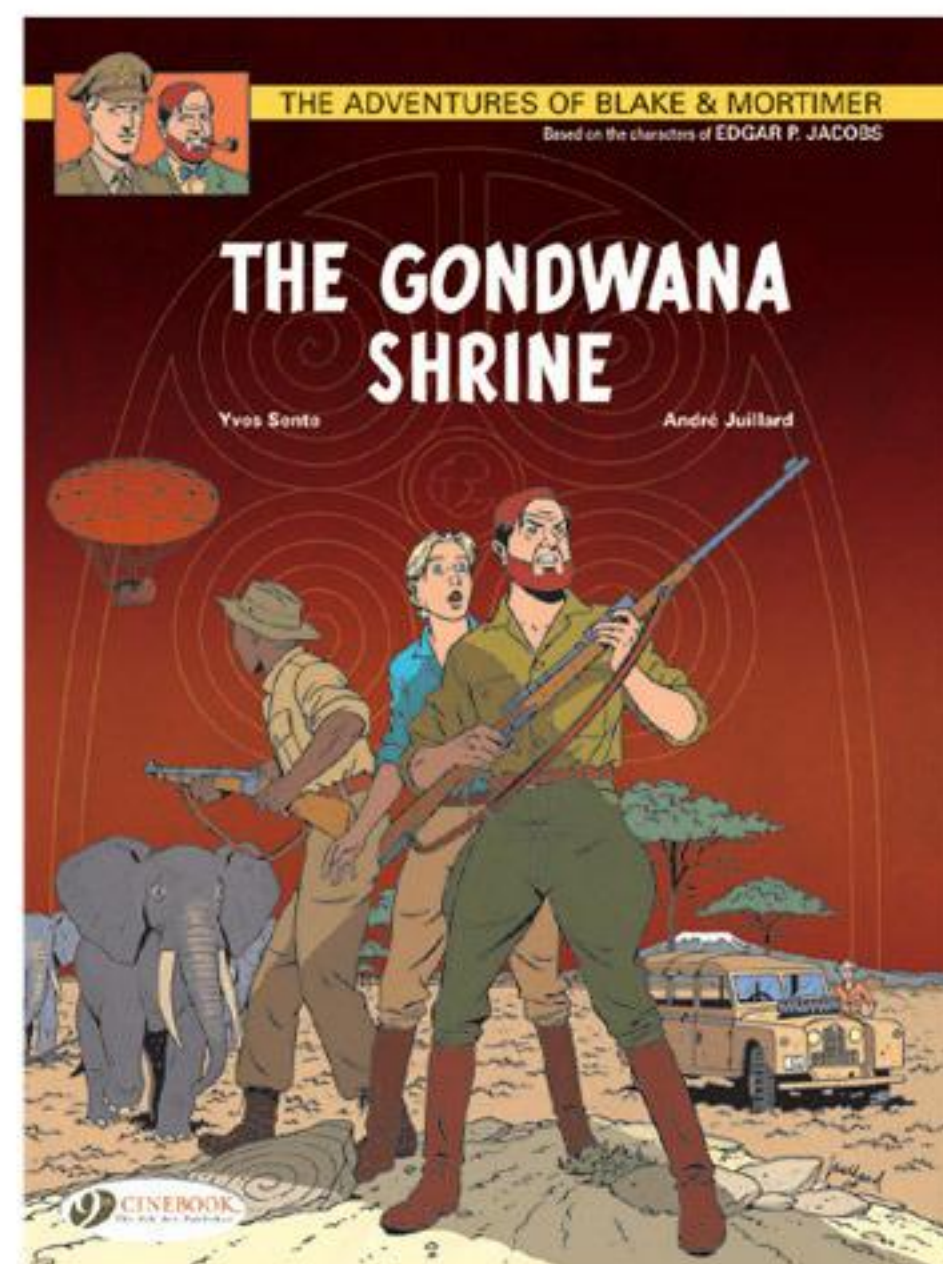
8-The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



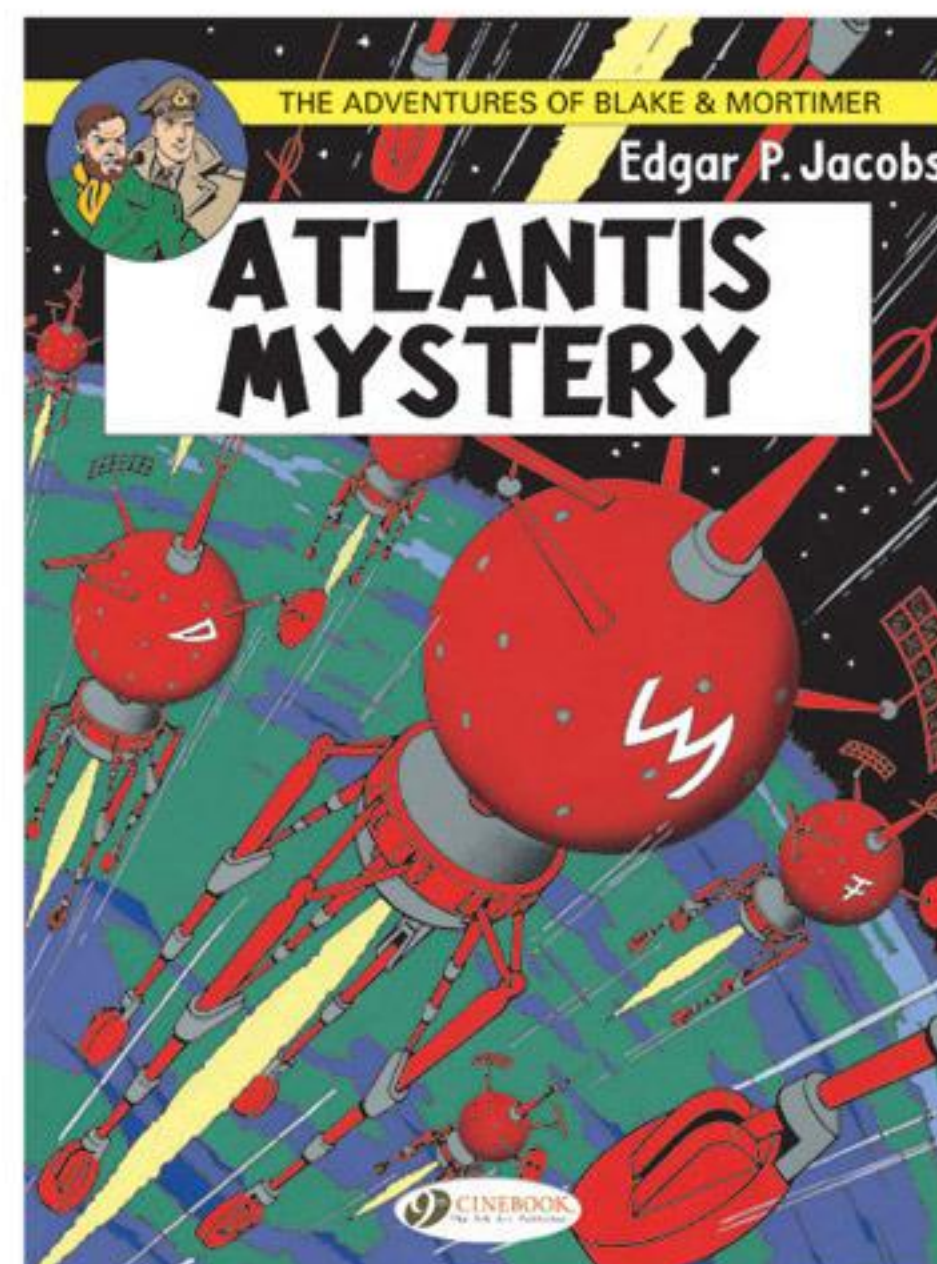
9-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



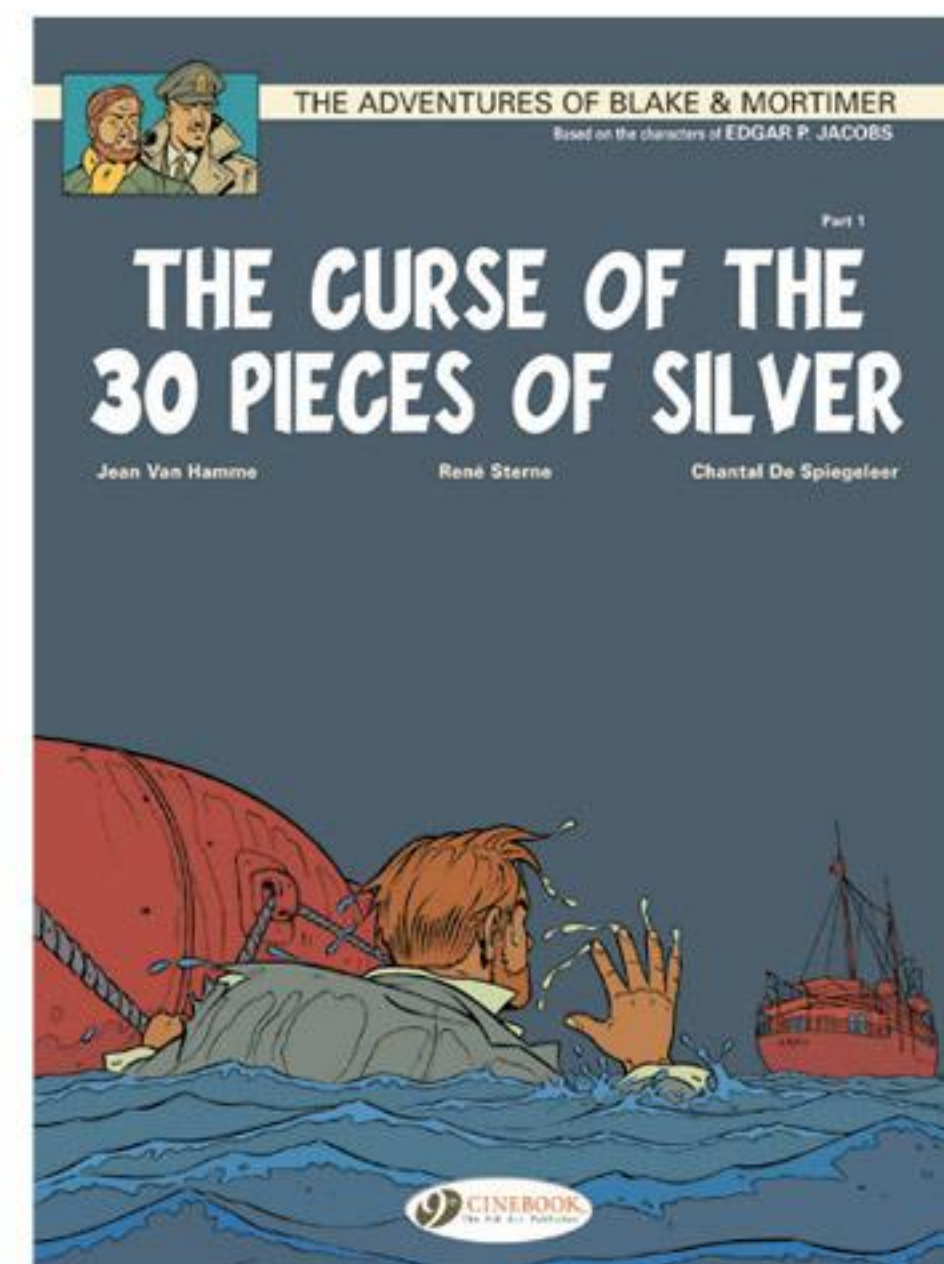
10-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



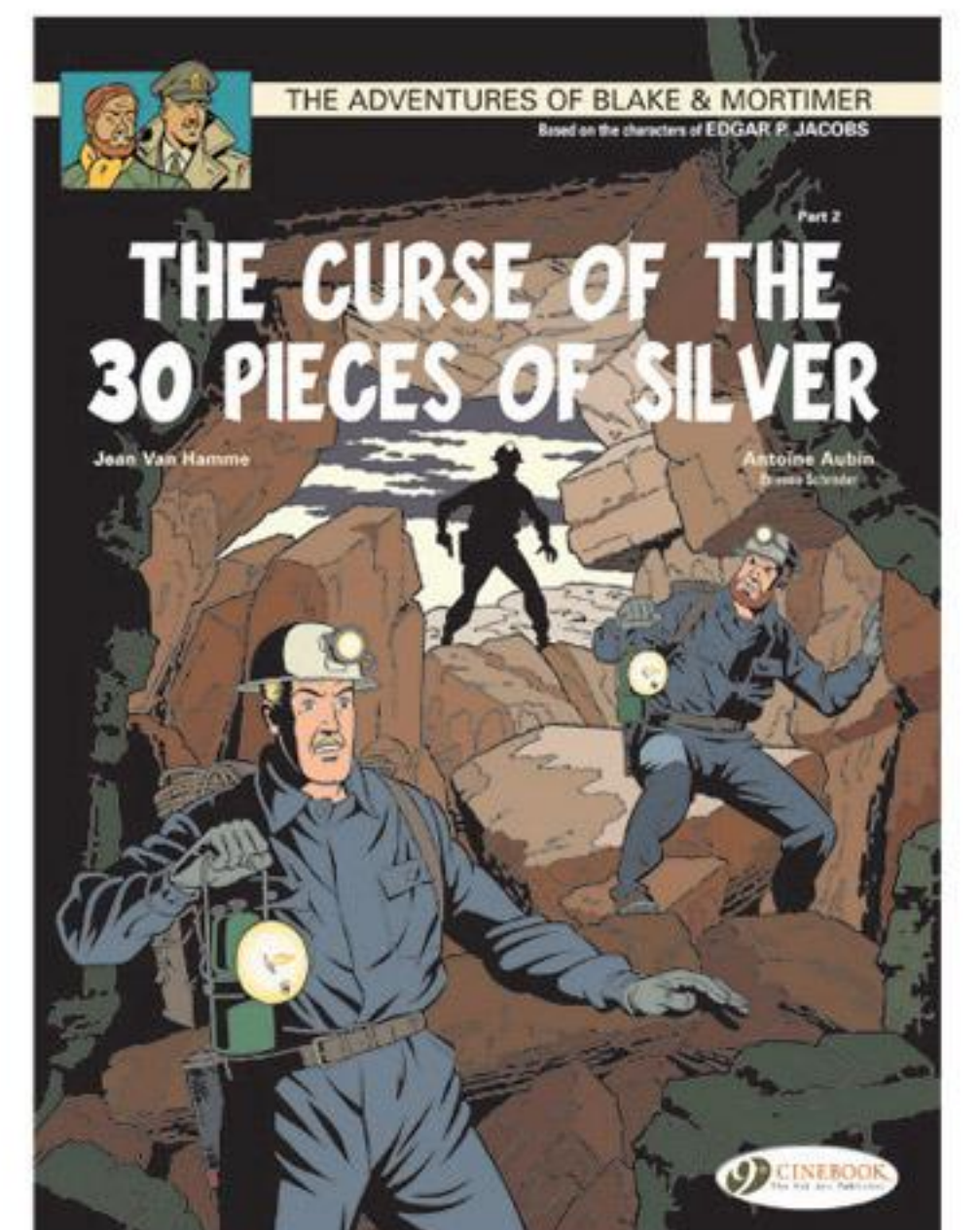
11-The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD



12-Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS

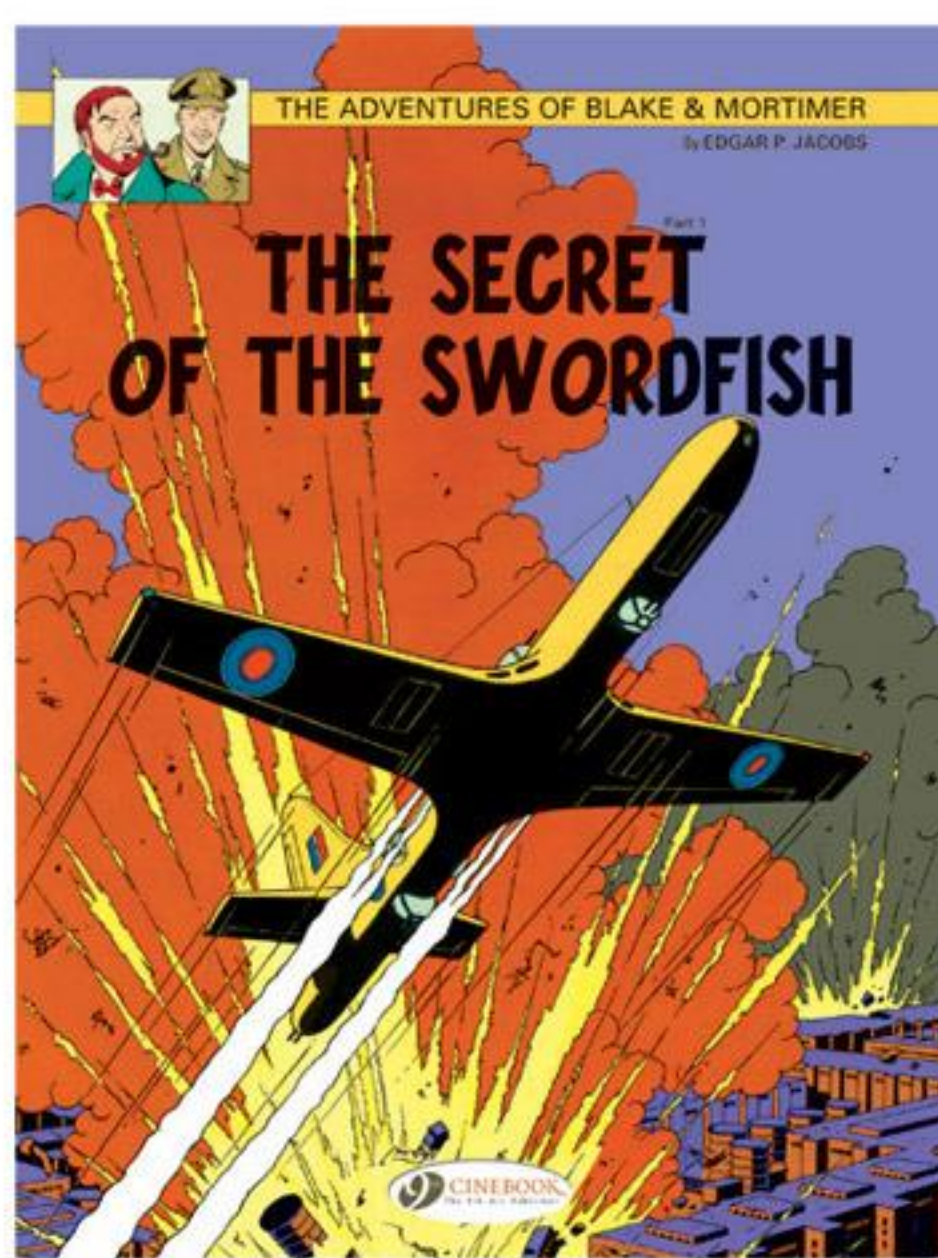


13-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER

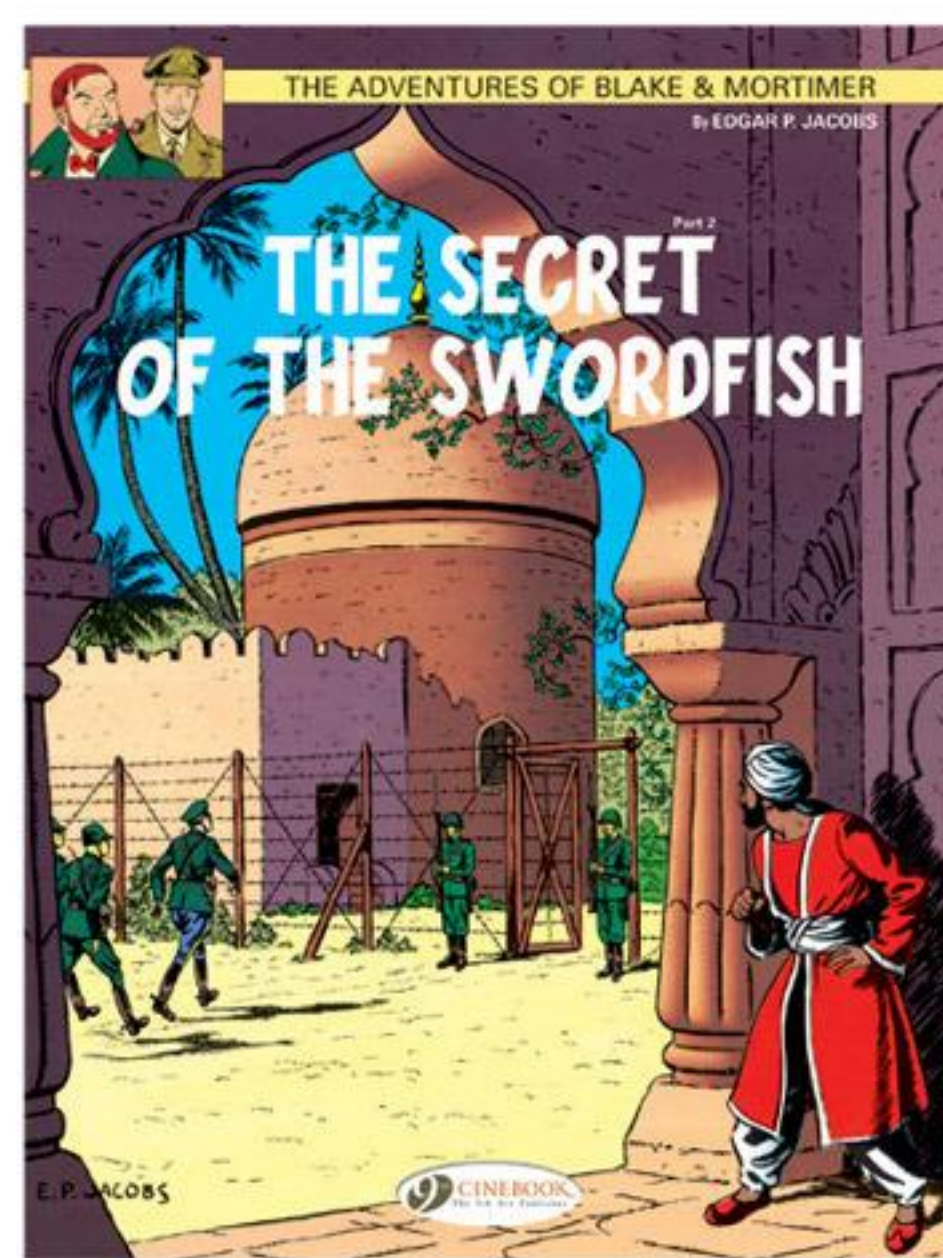


14-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHRÖDER

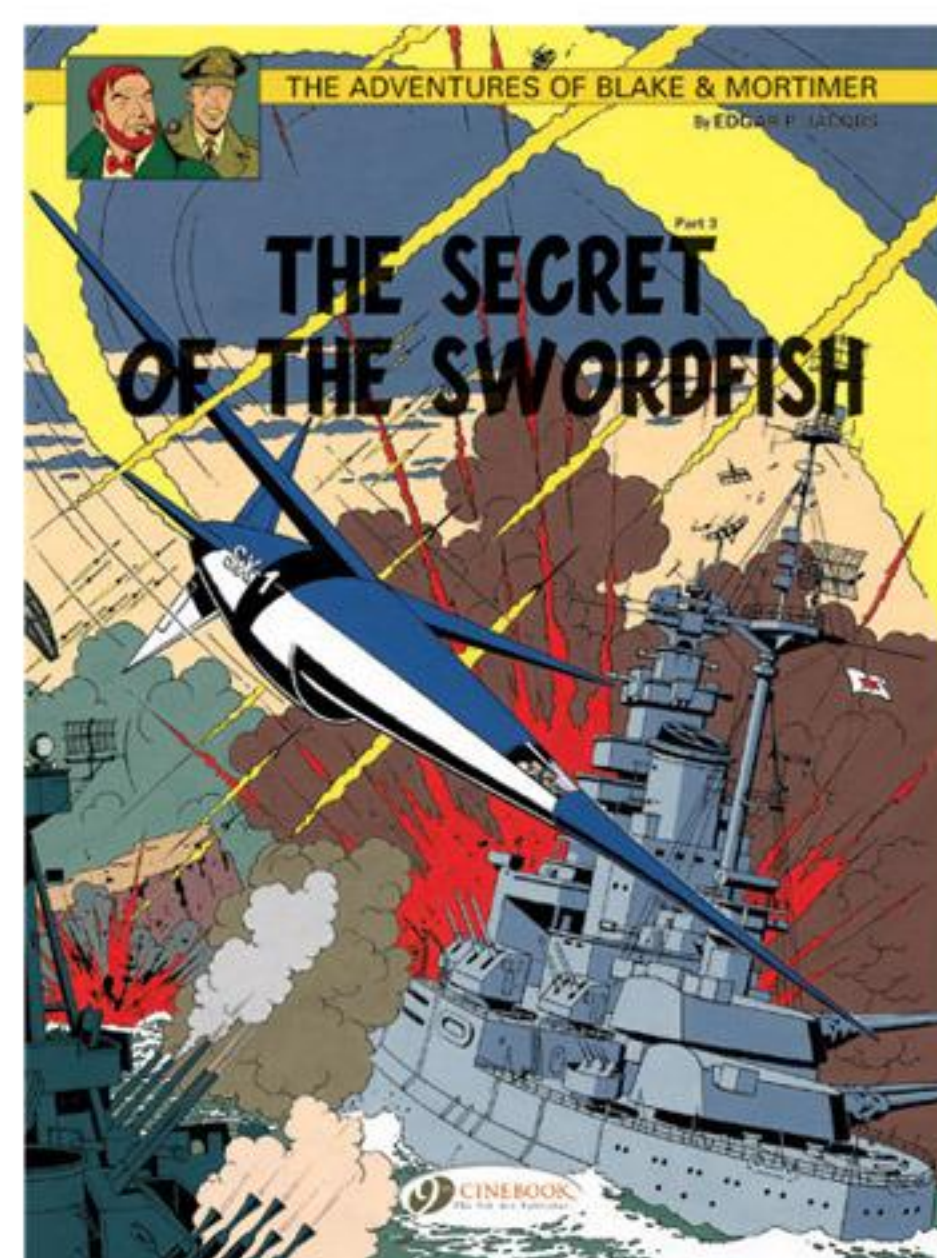
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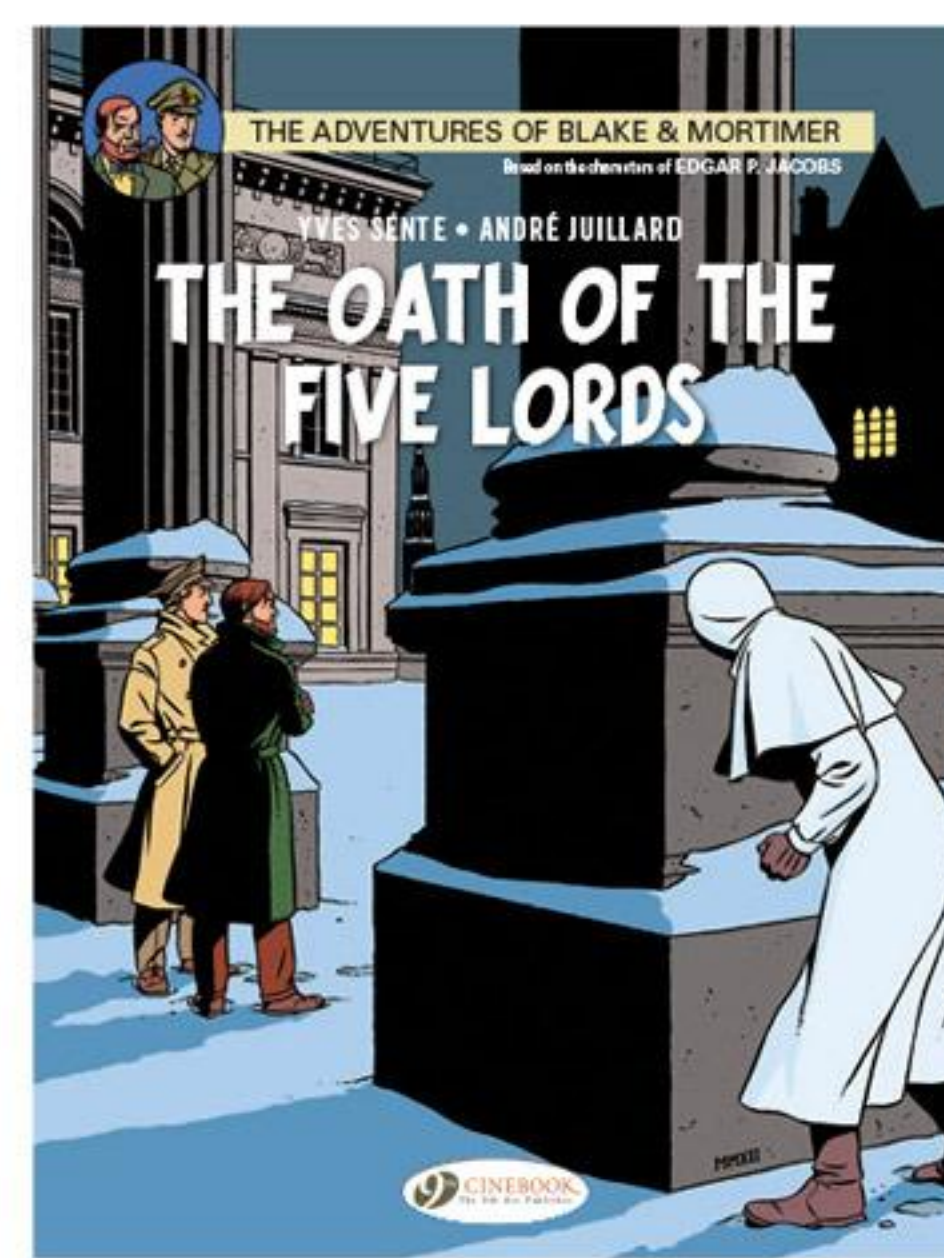
15-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



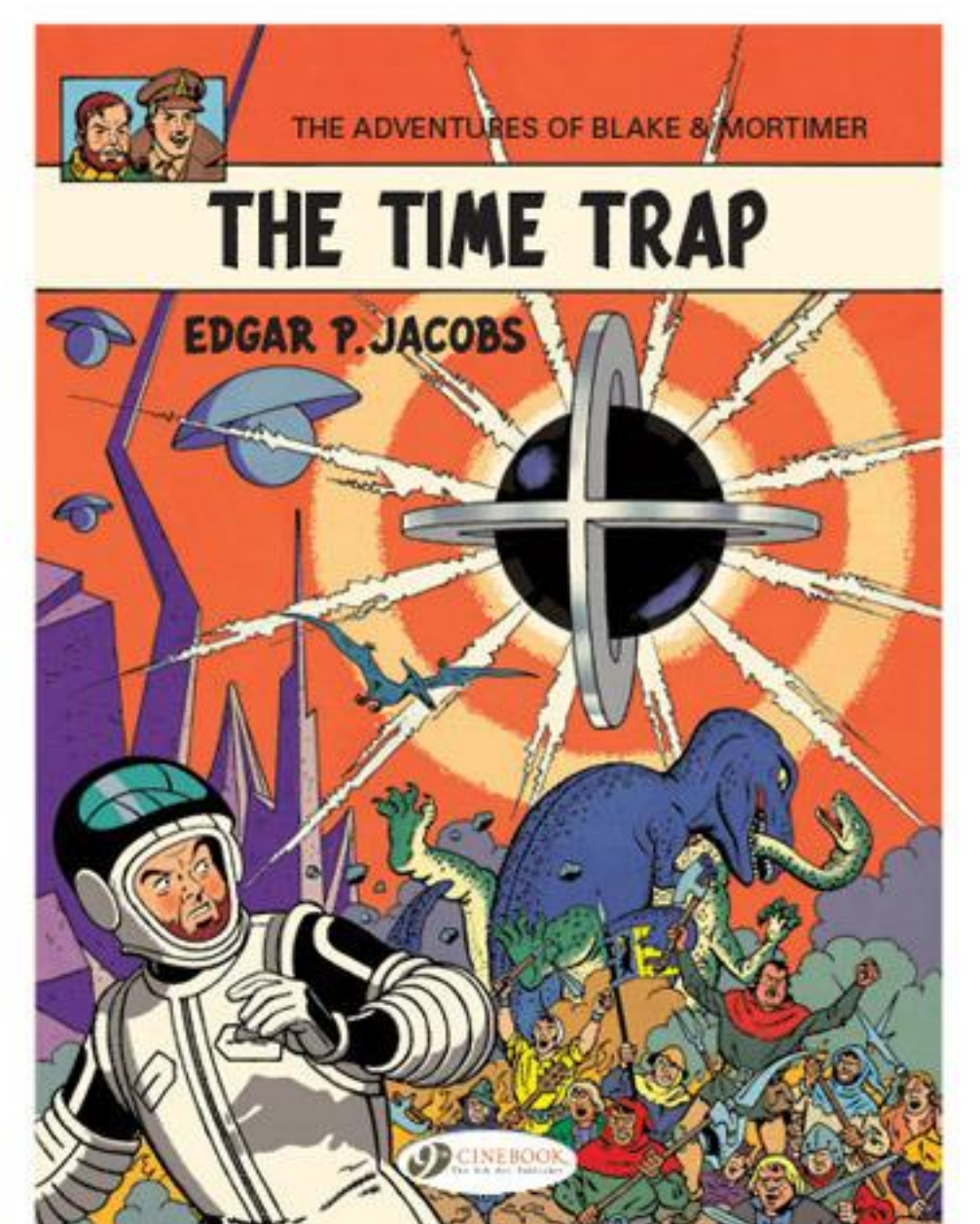
16-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



17-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
EDGAR P. JACOBS



18-The Oath of the Five Lords
SENTE - JUILLARD



19-The Time Trap
EDGAR P. JACOBS

2014

JACOBS

1946, the Swordfish, starting point of a masterful work

Article taken from the book: *The World of Edgar P. Jacobs* (Le Lombard publishers)



When, in 1946, daring publisher Raymond Leblanc decided to launch the magazine *Tintin*, Hergé called upon the services of his friend Jacobs. The latter proposed a medieval series, 'Roland the Bold', for which he wrote a complete script, but the project was discarded because there were already too many period costumed adventures in the magazine's layout.

Jacobs then proposed *The Secret of the Swordfish*, a futuristic series that was to open the cycle of Blake & Mortimer's adventures. The story was a great success with the public right from the start, and impressed many comic creators.

This episode was a reflection of the terrible conflict that had just ended with the terrifying destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Jacobs considered it a somewhat separate work. It was obvious that the Tibetan conquerors were really transposed Japanese, but page after page, Jacobs displayed unparalleled originality.

Regarding the technical side of dialogues, he eventually learnt, after some understandable trial-and-error, the proper placing of speech bubbles (the original publication of *The U Ray* didn't include any), eventually arriving, by the end of the second episode, at a chef-d'oeuvre of narrative figuration.

The unbalance between the end of the story and its beginning was such that, for its publication in graphic novel format, the author reworked the first 18 pages, even bringing them down to 17. Thus the lead-in became equally strong as the conclusion and, considering the end result, we can only agree with Jacobs' decision.

The Secret of the Swordfish reprised the idea of a submersible plane, which had first been seen at the beginning of the 20th century and was made popular by Jules Verne in *Master of the World* (1904). During the interwar period, the idea was used in the comic strip 'Tim Tyler's Luck' by Lyman Young, and even by Walt Disney with Mickey Mouse's 'submarplane'. There would however be two major differences between those stories and the *Swordfish*: the exemplary solidity of the script, and above all the design of the robotic machine, whose aerodynamic profile wasn't about to become outmoded any time soon.

To create the world-liberating machine, the conscientious Jacobs even hesitated between several devices, one of which was no less than an outstanding foreshadowing of the Polaris system! But in the end, it was the extraordinary white and blue Swordfish that won out – and still fascinates us today. This was a far cry from the approximate inventions that had come before Jacob's creation.



Cover of *Tintin* magazine (November 28, 1946)
© Edgar P. Jacobs

Correspondence between Claude le Gallo and Edgar P. Jacobs, November 20, 1967

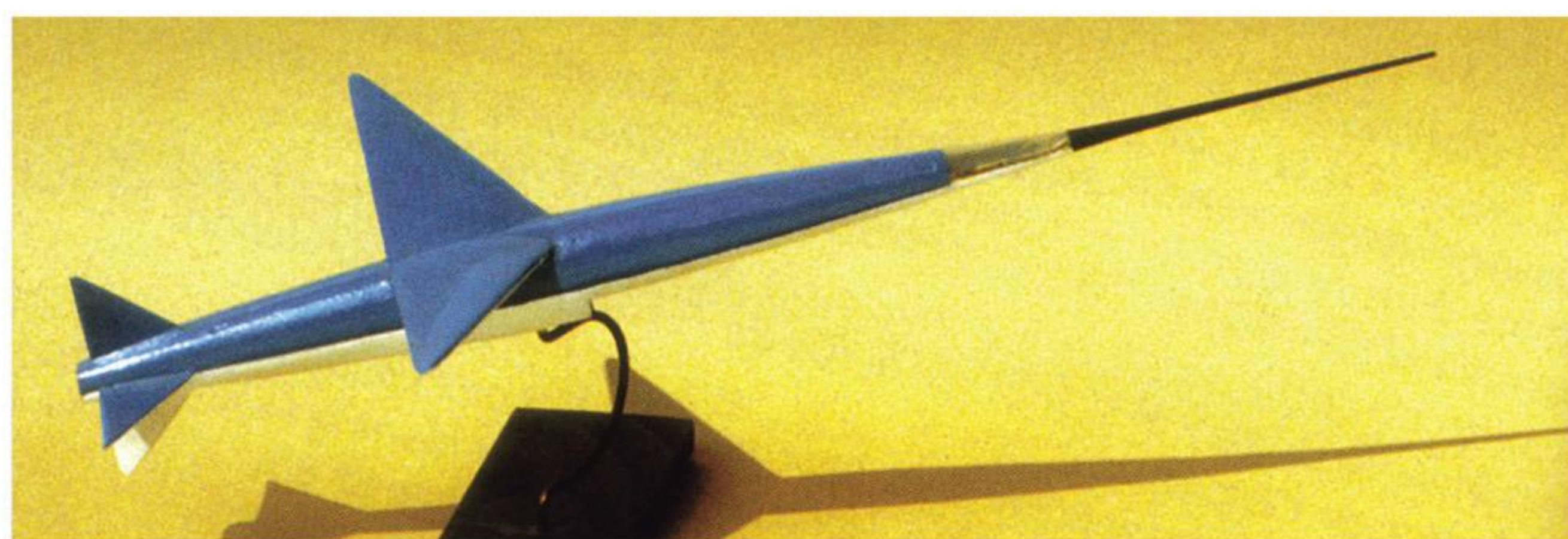
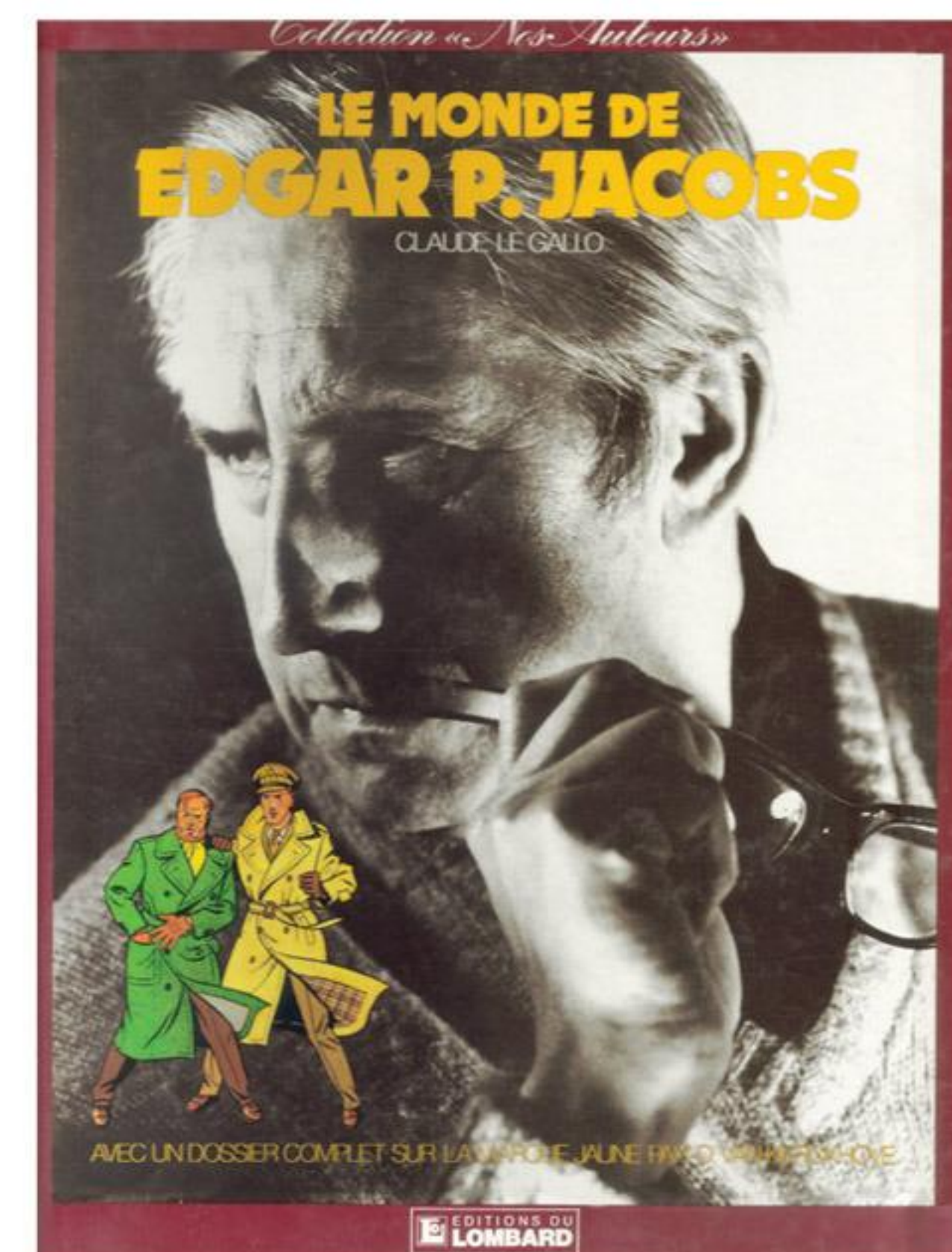
In order to allow for the revenge and liberation of the nations defeated by the Yellow Empire's lightning attack, I had to find, besides a base of operations (the secret base of the Strait of Hormuz), a weapon that would be nigh invulnerable as well as powerful enough to neutralize the invaders' enormous war machine, but also sufficiently small and easy to handle to evade their hunt. Which immediately excluded any idea of a surface base or vehicle. Indeed we had no, or almost no, documentation on recent weapons – and next to nothing concerning nuclear weapons, rockets, radars, etc... We were still stuck with conventional armament and propeller planes... My first idea had considered four potential projects:

- A supersonic plane with a nuclear armament
- A ballistic missile submarine (that launched while submerged)
- An underwater missile base (at the bottom of a lake)
- A supersonic plane operating from an underwater base

I'd eventually opted for the submarine plane but, although it was very daring at the time, it still remained a classic type of vehicle – aside from having a jet engine, being designed for remote control and flying out of the water. Its behaviour once in the air was more or less that of a 'stuka'. Strangely enough, where I'd extrapolated with wild abandon in *The U Ray*, now the fear of going beyond credibility, coupled with my dislike for American-style science-fiction, had me positively paralysed. Until, in the course of discussing that situation with an old friend, he swept aside

all my scruples and technical objections, encouraged me to move past this sudden faintheartedness and charge straight ahead into full-blown science-fiction (or rather what we still believed to be science-fiction!). In short, he managed to convince me, and then there was the Swordfish!

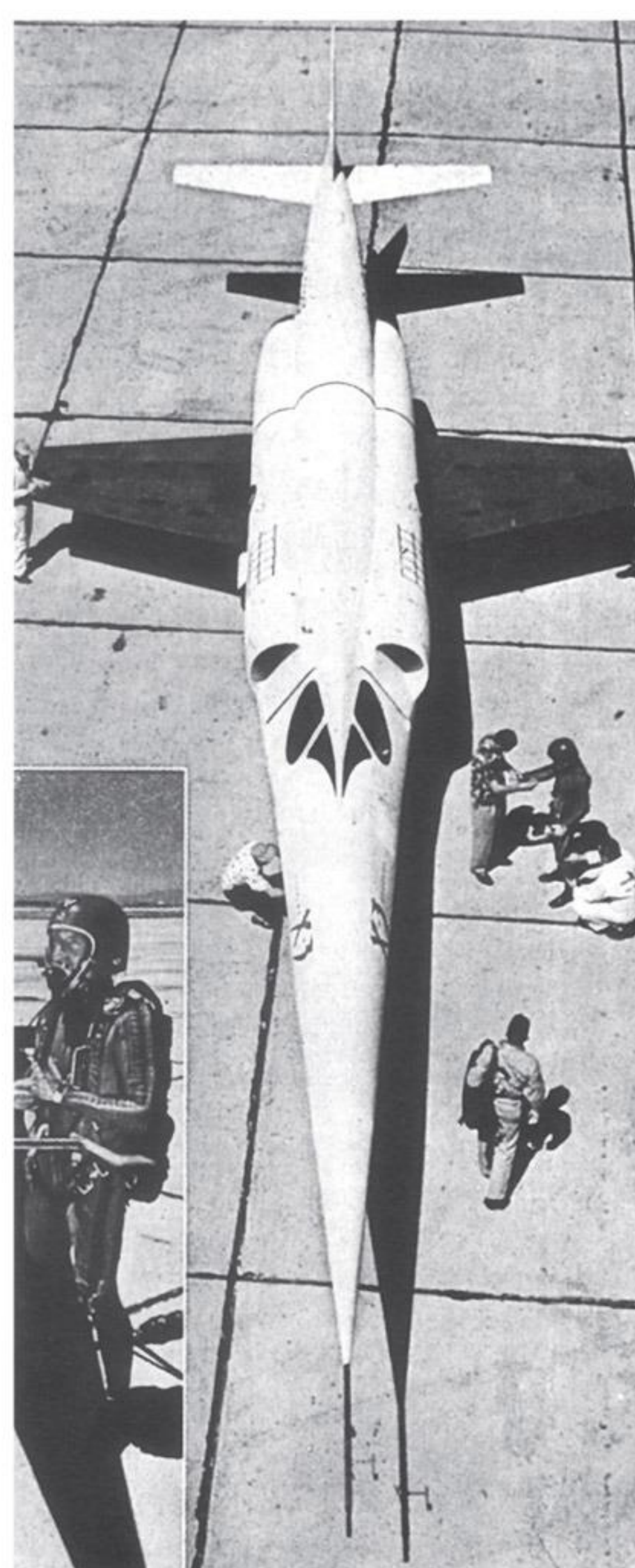
Once I'd accepted the principle, I launched into frenzied work. Keeping in mind, for the airframe, the different environments through which it would be called to perform – air and water – I made a series of very rough sketches and fairly quickly arrived at a silhouette that, to my eyes, seemed to meet the desired performance. Starting from there, I made a working drawing – plans, front view, side view, etc... – that I submitted for review to an expert in naval and aeronautical matters. Having concluded that no major impossibilities stood in the way of carrying out such a project, he built a model to scale. When I saw it, a name spontaneously came to my mind: swordfish! It had actually amply deserved that name, since I'd drawn inspiration from that fish's silhouette (as well as that of the shark) to create, from an aerodynamic standpoint, my machine's outline.



Model of the Swordfish

© Photos: Philippe Biermé

It is interesting to note that at the time that flying submarine was designed, a short-winged, slender-fuselage plane was not at all 'in'. On the contrary, the trend was all 'flying wings' and tail-less aircraft. I actually made a personal version of such an aircraft with Colonel Olrik's *Red Wing*. I'll mention also in passing the creation, still for the same story, of an Imperial fighter nicknamed the 'Flying Shark'. Seven years later, in 1953, the Americans unveiled an extraordinary plane, considered the most advanced of the time: the Douglas X3, which had a silhouette almost identical to that of the Swordfish. Finally – supreme accolade – 20 years later, the Americans announced the opening of an evaluation program between 44 manufacturers for a flying submarine project! And the US Navy clarified that this was in no way some science-fiction project; it deemed the existing technology sufficient to launch into the study of such a machine at that time.



DOUGLAS X3

© Science & Vie

Some technical details: the Swordfish was designed to be remote-controlled, and it was only under the pressure of events and running out of time that the heroes Blake and Mortimer, risking everything, took the extreme chance of flying the partially equipped aircraft themselves, taking the place of the remote-control mechanism.

The use and working of the controls are absolutely identical whether in flight or underwater. In flight, the engine's fuel feed is provided by the air. When diving, the air intake shuts off in contact with the water and automatically switches the circuit over to the oxygen tanks.

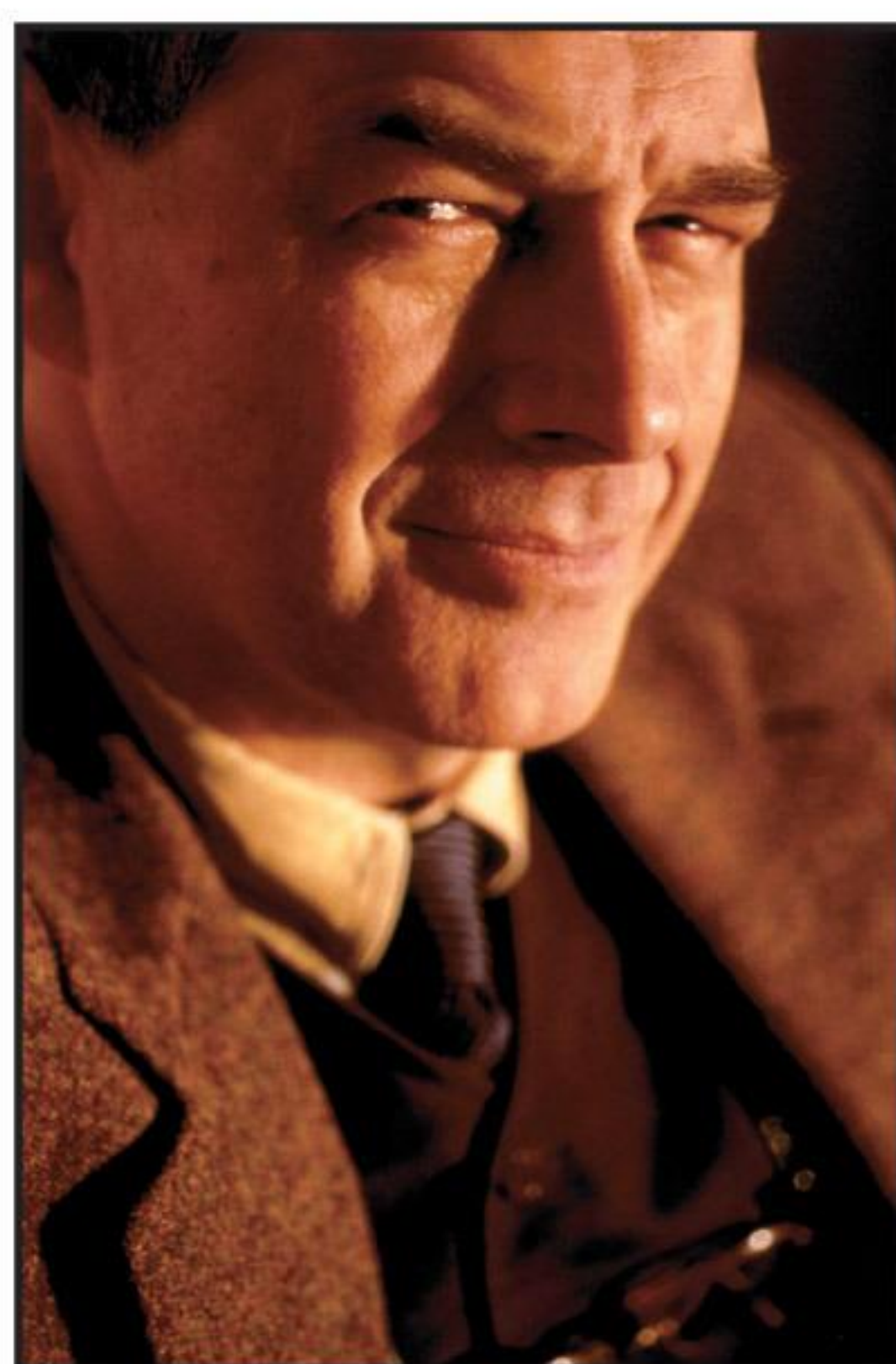
Note: the aircraft's nose drops off for pilot ejection.

Weapon load: infrared-guided, nuclear-tipped rockets and missiles.

DEATH IN THE PRESENT RE-AWAKENS A DARK TIME IN BLAKE'S PAST.



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ANDRÉ JUILLARD

THE OATH OF THE FIVE LORDS

March 2014

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY



YVES SENTÉ



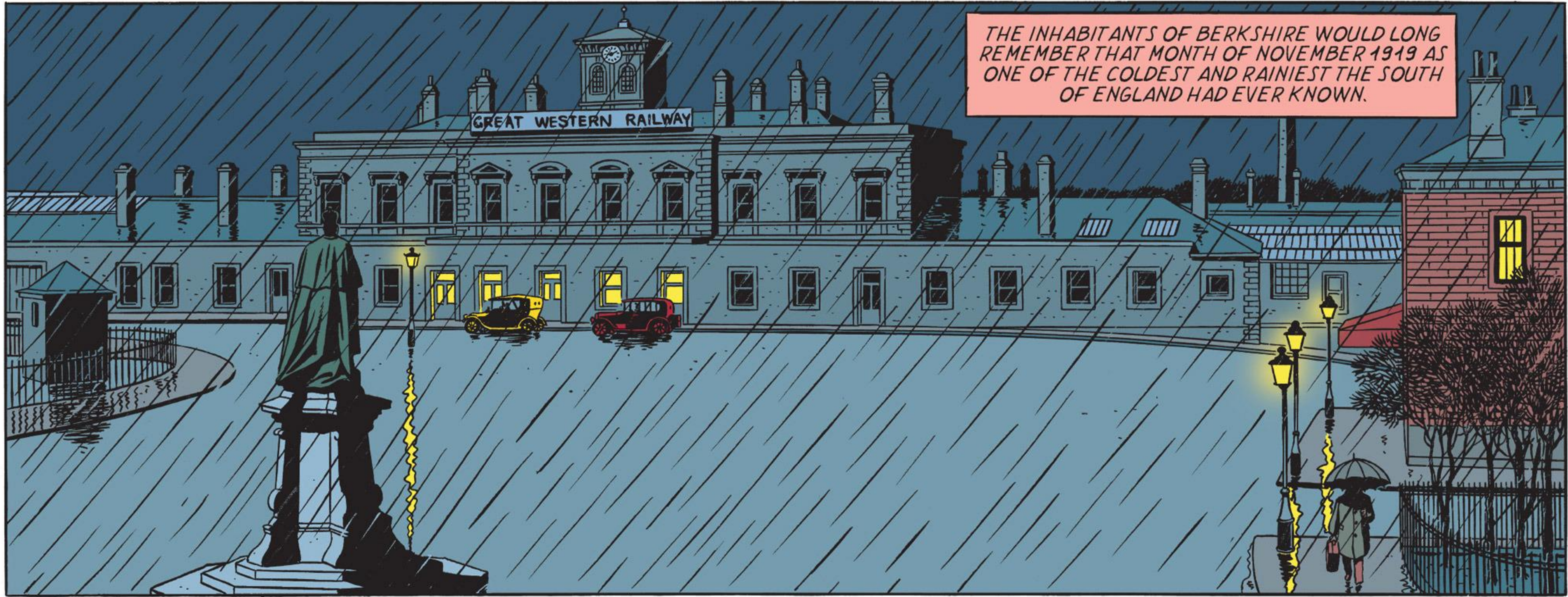
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

YVES SENTÉ • ANDRÉ JUILLARD

THE OATH OF THE FIVE LORDS





THE INHABITANTS OF BERKSHIRE WOULD LONG REMEMBER THAT MONTH OF NOVEMBER 1919 AS ONE OF THE COLDEST AND RAINIEST THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND HAD EVER KNOWN.



THAT EVENING, A MIX OF GLOOMINESS AND RESIGNATION COULD BE SEEN ON THE FACES OF THE FEW TRAVELLERS WAITING FOR A CONNECTION IN THE DAMP READING STATION.



My goodness! Will this rain ever stop pouring down? Barman, a double whisky! I feel like all this water has seeped through me all the way into my veins!



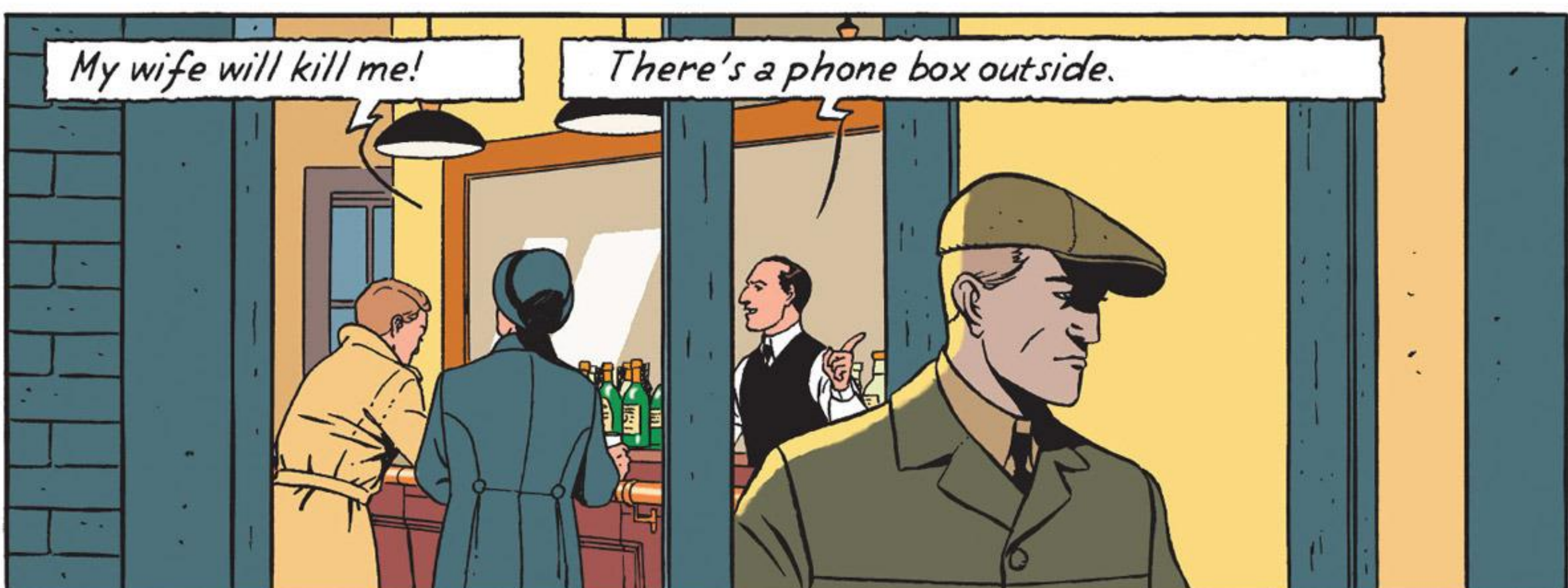
Aaaah! Blessed be our ancestors who invented this wonderful drink! I'd never have been able to board my connection to Bristol without this...

For Bristol, I doubt it. That train left ten minutes ago. But if you wait for the next one you'll have time to finish the bottle.



The London train is the last one tonight. To go to Bristol, you'll have to come back tomorrow.

Tomorrow?! But that's impossible! A taxi! I need a taxi!



My wife will kill me!

There's a phone box outside.



There's Peter. He's got the suitcase.

I'm not blind, Agent Carter!



The suitcase, sir.

Thank you, Peter.



This is it. Take it to the other car and get ready. The train should be arriving soon.



TCHFFFF
TCHFFFF



TCHFFFF TCHFFFF TCHFFFF
Bang on time! Ladies and gentlemen, you have five minutes to pay for your drinks, please!



It... It can't be! It was right here!...

What was right here?



My suitcase! Good heavens! It was here!

Calm down, sir. No doubt another traveller will have taken it by mistake, thinking it was his...



It happens quite often, you know. I bet you your suitcase will be back before...

When someone picks up the wrong luggage, they leave their own behind!



It's a nightmare!



There must be an explanation... Who would like to steal clothes and...

You don't understand! I simply MUST find that suitcase!



Calm down and get inside that car, Mr Lawrence. There are several of us, and we're all armed.

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with new teams of writers and artists.



ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION		
1	1950	Le secret de l'Espadon, T1
2	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T2
3	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T3
4	1954	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1
5	1955	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2
6	1956	La marque Jaune
7	1957	L'énigme de l'Atlantide
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores
9	1962	Le piège diabolique
10	1967	L'affaire du collier
11	1971	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T1
12	1990	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)
13	1996	L'affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)
14	2000	La machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)
15	2001	L'étrange rendez-vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)
16	2003	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)
17	2004	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)
21	2012	Le serment des cinq Lords (Sente/Juillard)

CINEBOOK EDITION		
15	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
16	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
17	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
1	2007	The Yellow "M"
12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
19	2014	The Time Trap
7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2
4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
8	2010	The Voronov Plot
5	2009	The Strange Encounter
9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2
18	2014	The Oath of the Five Lords

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